

His Curse of Binding

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by [orphan_account](#)

Summary

Tommy had lived and died as Theseus, Icarus, Orpheus and Sisyphus. But all he wanted to be was free.

In which Tommy Soot, originally born in 1509, is cursed to be reborn, to never reach adulthood unless he figured out the Greek myth of his lifetime. He had one rule of not allowing himself to get attached to people but he would have never guessed that a foster family of the creator of Minecraft, an anime stan and a Soundcloud musician would break that rule.

~ SBI Foster AU but with Greek mythology.

Notes

tw's for this fic (some are already tagged):

- referenced past child abuse,
- past suicide,
- parental death mention and drug addiction,
- unsafe consumption of medication, underage drinking,
- suicidal thoughts/ideation,
- death in general,
- scars mention (not SH), self-sabotage.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy didn't care that murder was illegal now, it wasn't in his first life, so it shouldn't matter now. If Linda Smith opened her mouth one more time to *educate* him about the consequences of his actions, she deserved it. So what if threatening one of your foster brothers was 'immature' and 'borderline harassment'? The prick shouldn't have used Tommy's notebook to demonstrate one of the many reasons why no one in this world would ever adopt him, which was majorly due to his shit art skills.

The notebook was special to Tommy. It was the only thing that stayed with him each rebirth and the pages could never be filled. No matter the amounts of written rants he had about how weak France was for their government to be overthrown by a guy whose name sounded like the ice cream—the 1780s were rough—the pages kept coming.

Even though the book was primarily used for his analysis of Greek myth tragedies and served as a constant reminder of the shitty lives he experienced, he had a sentimental connection to it.

"Tommy, are you even listening to me?" apparently Linda, his social worker, was still going on about the insignificant and little incident he had with another guy. It was just silly and not worth spending this much time talking about.

"Yes, ma'am, absolutely." Tommy would salute but he didn't want to be shouted at again. He didn't want to add any more grey hairs to Linda's already balding head. "You were just in the middle of dismissing me of needing to be punished because I am the victim in this situation."

"How comes in every fight you have, you are both the initiator and victim?"

"Personally, I don't see it that way and the only way to see it is the way I see it." He was sure what he said made sense, but the glare Linda gave him proved him wrong.

"You held a pencil to Zack's throat."

"Well..."

"And then threatened to shank him and his whole family, full-well knowing he's an orphan."

Tommy laughed. "But it was funny though."

The look of discontent on Linda's poorly-ageing face only caused him to laugh harder.

"Look, Tom—"

"Don't call me that."

“Tom, I know you’re acting out because you’re being relocated soon, but it’s finalised. No amount of death threats can stop the Craft’s from fostering you.”

He took this as a challenge.

“Clearly, I haven't tried hard enough.”

“If this is about what happened at the last house, I promise you that won’t happen again.” The humoured smile on his face fell.

Linda just had to ruin everything. First, it was his life (arguably, a green bastard was more to blame for that), then it was his mood. He thought social workers were supposed to prevent childhood trauma rather than consistently bring it up when unprompted.

“Oh my God, lady can you just...” he gestured for Linda to, as you could say, fuck off so he could focus on something else rather than the shaking in his hands and his heartbeat that decided to act up for some totally unprovoked reason.

“Alright, I get it. Punishment for today’s events still stands though. And no, you can’t steal dessert from the younger children again.”

“They need to respect their elders.”

“Then why don’t you respect me?”

Tommy was tempted to explode on her, not in the literal sense—he wasn’t a victim of rigged explosives this time around—but in a metaphorical way. A way that would hopefully result in Linda crying and realising the weight of her words. He usually had little daydreams of arguments with his social worker, of him finally letting go and releasing the burden that was only physical on his back, shoulders, and torso. But that will never happen because that would require acknowledging his past lives in detail and Tommy preferred to stay in the bliss his ignorance created.

Instead, he resorted to his normal tactics: annoying the shit out people and ignoring everything serious.

“I said elders, not ancients.”

Tommy narrowly avoided a smack across the wrist and grinned at the lady. Nothing said disregarding your anxiety by taking the piss out of old people.

“Go to your room and pack your things. Be ready for later.”

Contrary to belief, Tommy wasn't popular in the home. Between terrorising his carers, many ex-social workers and being the oldest amongst the parentless lot, it didn't result in him having many friends. So when it was time to leave, he didn't have anyone to say goodbye to. He liked it this way though. He doubted that he'd even return to this shit-hole before his time was up and a new myth continued the cycle.

All he brought with him to the car was two bags, one for school and another for the items he had gathered—stolen—throughout the years.

Tommy hated this part of relocation. Being trapped in a car with Linda Smith as she played the shit music of the 21st century wasn't something he enjoyed. The only music he tolerated were those bardcore Medieval style covers of modern music he found on YouTube. They reminded him of better times when people believed that disease was caused by God and crime was easier. Maybe not *better* times, but simpler ones. He'd take surviving the plague again over a two-hour-long car journey with Linda any day.

"You did read the file I gave you about the Craft family, didn't you?"

Tommy did not.

The last time he read his foster family file, he thought that was going to be his forever home and *not* a scheme for child labour and exploitation via YouTube vlogging. Don't ask, it gets more confusing. Just imagine a married couple mixed with a dash of infidelity who foster small, cute children just to vlog their every waking moment without their consent for some ad revenue on a family channel. One hundred percent illegal and one thousand percent fucked up.

Their apology video was pretty funny though.

"—he's adopted before and has a biological son as well, Wilbur, but unlike the other houses, your foster brothers will be older than you."

Tommy was used to screaming babies and bratty toddlers, but apparently now he had to get accustomed to depressed college students and unemployed young adults still living with their parents. If there was one thing he appreciated about his curse, it was that he'd never have to get a job or be an adult. Ever. Evading taxes and responsibilities since 1509.

"Phil Craft is an expert with cases like you." Tommy raised his eyes from his notebook and glared at her. Her grip on the steering wheel tightened and he wondered whether that was because she knew he'd attempt to swerve them off the road. "So hopefully, if you behave, you won't be my problem anymore."

As soon as the word 'problem' left her lips, Tommy's interest in keeping a civil and professional conversation with a patronising dickhead faded. In all the shitty people in his life, Linda wasn't even on the leader board, but her words cut deeper than any blade had. She wasn't like the others in the past, they didn't conceal their hatred for him with fake concern or kindness. They were upfront with it, weapon in hand and murder in their eyes.

Tommy preferred that to whatever the fuck this was.

With a glance down to the tattoo—the curse that bound him to nothing but cyclical pain—on his wrist, he sighed. Just like his destiny, the car journey continued with no ounce of free will in sight.

It surprised him that his normal visitor in his dreams didn't swing by when he fell asleep in the car.

Normally, before any traumatic event or major change, the fucker would come to gloat. But, ever since what happened in his last life, with Sisyphus, his visitor had left him alone. With this new knowledge, Tommy hoped whoever opened the door to the Craft household wasn't about to make his life a lot worse.

They had parked in front of a normal middle-class looking house, maybe on the upper-middle-class scale as it screamed 'Tory' to him. Baskets of flowers hung next to the door and a bike was parked on the porch, which was just asking to be stolen. As it was the evening, the sun had set, and Tommy had to admit that the little neighbour looked pretty in this light.

"So, where are we exactly?" Tommy asked as he exited the car.

"Snowchester." Noticing the lack of snow, he frowned at her. "Historic name, it has nothing to do with the weather."

"Don't tell me this is another small town with its own lore," he groaned, not wanting to be recruited into a cult again (his Icarus past life didn't have fun in Transylvania during the late 1600s).

"I wouldn't describe a Civil War during the 16th century as 'lore' but... yes, this town has an important history."

"Isn't that an Avenger's movie?"

"Tommy stop stalling and come with me to the door." He muttered very incriminating things under his breath but reluctantly followed Linda to probably his last destination during this lifetime. "Remember, be on your best behaviour."

She knocked on the brown door and the silence disturbed him. Usually, Linda would carry on with her irritating speech about him not misbehaving, but for once, her mouth remained shut. If only she had been this way from the very beginning.

When the door opened, it took everything in Tommy to not burst out laughing. At first glance, the man behind the door looked like he'd beat the shit out of you if you breathed the wrong way. The dyed pink hair and glasses favoured the 'I'm an anime antagonist' vibe

Tommy got from him. But the Minecraft pig slippers on the man's feet destroyed any fear Tommy felt for one second. This wasn't an anime antagonist, it was just a buff nerd.

"You're not an Amazon package," the man said in the most monotone and American voice he had ever heard.

Tommy blinked at him, stumped. "You couldn't fit me in a box anyway."

Linda sighed from beside him and he had no idea why. His response was perfectly reasonable. The anime man seemed to agree by how his emotionless and deadpan face changed ever so slightly, maybe in amusement or general annoyance...or both. Tommy had that effect on people.

The man still had his hand on the door, almost unsure if he should let them in or shut it in their faces. Footsteps came from behind the door.

"Is it my package of illegal substances from my favourite shipping company that benefits from low wages in their supply chain and extreme tax avoidance—?" the door widened and an even taller man with curly brown hair entered the frame. "Oh. Hello."

"Hi, I'm Linda Smith from Kinoko Foster Care." The taller man had the audacity to look embarrassed now. "I spoke to your father earlier today, is he here?"

Without a second of hesitation, the new guy shouted, "Dad, your child is here!" and walked back into his house.

Tommy failed at concealing the growing smile on his face because he knew Linda was seconds away from bursting a blood vessel at how unprofessional this entire shitfest was.

The other man stood awkwardly and stepped out of the way, opening the door so they could enter.

The inside of the house supported Tommy's worry that these guys were Tories. No normal house had a kitchen with an island and two separate tables to sit on. Why would you need a dining table and a smaller table? The lack of artificial smell and scented candles from some Dior shop in London confused the Conservative vibe though. No sign saying 'Live, Love, Laugh' either. Maybe these guys actually cared about the poor after all. There was a picture frame on the wall of a Minecraft house for some reason. So they're Minecraft stans as well.

As Tommy slipped his bag off his back and Linda fiddled with her bracelet (something she would only do when contemplating quitting), voices came from around the corner, in the living room.

"Wilbur what did I tell you about saying random shit in front of social workers?" Tommy assumed the voice was Phil, as it was older but also northern. Why did everyone in this household have a different accent? Northern, southern, and fucking American.

"I genuinely thought it was the Amazon guy!"

"Just shut it before she thinks we're doing illegal shit."

“But what about the shed-”

“Shut!”

At the sight of Phil, it took everything in Tommy not to rush out of the house. He looked too much like *he* did. The blonde hair, the familiar blue eyes, straight nose, and light beard. The spitting image of his father. His first father and the only one that meant anything to him. Not that he meant anything *good* to Tommy.

Instead of snatching the car keys out of Linda’s hand and booking it out of here, he froze. The timid comfortability in this chest died. He couldn’t move.

“Ah, sorry for the confusion Ms Smith. I forgot to tell the boys you were coming today,” Phil glanced at him with a soft smile. “You must be Tommy. I’m Phil, these are my sons Wilbur and Techno.” He was too bothered by Phil to even care about the fact that anime man was named after a music genre.

Tommy nodded. He didn’t risk opening his mouth to answer in case a whimper left it. It had been a while since something like this happened and he never trusted himself when it did. Wilbur and Techno stared at him as if he was one of those little exotic animals in a zoo, with intrigue and disguised judgement. He didn’t dare to look Phil in the eyes again.

“Well,” Linda clasped her hands together, making Tommy flinch at the sudden sound, “before I leave Tommy to get himself situated, I need to discuss something with you Phil if that’s alright.”

Linda wasn’t very subtle at hinting to his new foster parent that she needed to bitch about Tommy to him. You’d think she would use a different phrase every time she did this, but nope.

“That’s fine, join me in the kitchen then. Will, Techno can you show Tommy around his new home?”

“I’ll come with you, Techno do the tour,” Wilbur interjected, pushing Techno closer towards Tommy.

There was something comedic in the death stare Wilbur received from Techno. When the three left the room, Tommy stopped tunnelling his hands into his sleeves and crossed his arms.

“All I need to know is where the bathroom and my bedroom is, big man,” Tommy said, sensing that neither of them wanted to do this.

Techno pointed at a door. “Bathroom,” and then pointed at the stairs, “bedrooms are all upstairs, yours is the first door on the right. Mine is next to yours, Wilbur’s opposite, and Phil’s next to his. There’s another bathroom upstairs.”

“Nice tour. Didn’t even need to move.” Techno gave him a look of exasperation, which Tommy frowned at.

“I thought you’d want to hear your social worker talking about you,” Techno said, surprising him. “You haven’t seen the kitchen yet.”

Tommy grinned. “Show me the way anime man.”

“Don’t call me that.”

They stopped at the door to the kitchen, which was left ajar, and Linda’s scratchy and patronising voice was easy to hear from there.

For a solid minute, she was just chatting about general things that aren’t mentioned on his file (for instance, his amazing personality, or perhaps more about his previous home with the YouTube vloggers). But then she got onto the shittier stuff.

“Now, as we warned you before, he’s a flight risk and a problem at that,” Tommy rolled his eyes and bit on the inside of his cheek to stop himself from cussing her out, “We assume he had a rough past in the last fostering agency with the gang tattoo and scars he has. So if this becomes an issue with you in the future, don’t worry, this won’t be the first time it has—”

Her tone left Tommy uncomfortable. The marks of Theseus prickled against the ripped flesh on his back. The same stains that killed the naïve child soldier who would follow his big brother to the ends of the world. And a cliff so happened to be that end.

With his hands shaking, Tommy stared straight ahead and ignored the heavy gaze of Techno, “That’s enough listening.”

He moved away from the door and went into what he assumed was the living room, trying not to collapse on one of the sofas. He was still exhausted from the lack of sleep from last night, the shit car journey here, Linda in general, and now this. A family with two weird brothers and a father whose appearance hit too close to home.

Tommy jumped at Techno as he sat down next to him. He looked as if he were psyching himself up to start a conversation; Tommy knew the signs since he did the same thing.

“So... are you an orphan?” that was not the conversation starter Tommy was expecting, but it sure did knock the exhaustion out of him momentarily.

“What the fuck kind of question is that?” Tommy asked, gasping for air.

“A non-rhetorical one.”

“You smartass.” Techno’s facial expression didn’t change. “You actually want me to answer that? Don’t you know how triggering and insensitive and triggering it is to ask a child your family is about to foster if their parents are dead?”

He tried to hide his amusement with this entire situation and apparently failed due to how Techno didn’t have a shred of guilt or remorse in him.

“See, what you’ve essentially done is answer my non-rhetorical question with another question that I’m going to treat as rhetorical ‘cause I’m not answering it.”

“Yes! I am an orphan, you fucking weirdo.”

“That’s pretty cringe.” Tommy didn’t know how to respond to that.

Despite how Tommy was confused and felt like he *should* be offended, the conversation fuelled his interest in the pink anime man. He admired anyone who made fun of orphans and used it as their small talk prompt.

He was too focused on his stare-off with Techno to notice the others coming back from the kitchen. Wilbur seemed confused at seeing Tommy and Techno on a sofa together, and he had no idea why. Phil looked delighted. This family was fucking weird.

Linda clasped her hands together again, “Well, I best be off then as everything’s in order. I’ll visit again in a couple of weeks to check up on everything.”

His new foster family said their goodbyes to Linda whilst Tommy stayed silent. He didn’t want to waste any more energy on that prick. When the door slammed shut, the entire situation finally hit him. This was his new house, and if he was still here for at least half a year, then it would be his last. Stuck with anime man, a tall weird guy, and the doppelganger of his father. Fun.

Now, he had no idea what to do. His only other experience with a foster house had screaming toddlers, cameras in every ceiling corner of the room, and creepy adults. He wouldn’t admit that he was nervous, anxious even, at this change, but deep down he was scared. Scared of Phil, what this house meant and his upcoming sixteenth birthday.

“Tommy, have you eaten today?” Phil asked from where he was stood. Phil and Wilbur hadn’t moved since Linda left. Maybe they didn’t know what to do either.

Instead of facing his fears and embracing change, Tommy pussied out.

“Yes, I have.” He had not. “Is it ok if I go to bed early? I know where my room is already.”

“Sure mate, you’ve probably had a busy day. We’ll talk more in the morning.”

He scurried out of the living room at a nonsuspicious pace, picking up his bags with him, and ran up the stairs. He didn’t like how all confidence left his body when Linda went. It should have been the opposite.

The upstairs looked similar to the living room, with light decoration and sparing photographs of the family members on the walls. Still no ‘Live, Love, Laugh’ posters thankfully.

Tommy opened the first door to his right, kept the light switched off and stepped inside. The walls were white and empty, besides the painting of an island nailed above the double bed. The room had some furniture: a desk and a closet with some draws.

He walked towards the window and sighed at the lock. He recognised the brand on the glass anyway. Suicide prevention windows. Nice.

All he needed to do to die was call upon *him* and say an incorrect name. No window needed. Courtesy of his curse.

Regardless, he threw his bags at the end of the bed and grabbed his notebook and cow plushie, Henry, out of it. The darkness in the room added to his fatigue to the point where he didn't care about sleeping in his only good t-shirt and uncomfortable jeans. He slipped under the covers and unbolted his notebook, searching for the page he always went to before going to sleep. The only page to have his brother's—albeit messy—handwriting in it. To his day, Tommy was glad he pestered his older brother enough for him to write a note in it, even before he knew that the notebook would always be reborn with him.

His fingers outlined the message:

Tommy Soot is forcing me to write this. Help me. I will never write that he is the biggest man, he is rather quite small and dainty. A child. Also, his diary book is shite. No idea where he got it, but it's ugly. Much like him.

— *W. Soot.*

It was a stupid message, but it brought him comfort. He closed the book and placed it under his pillow. He clutched his cow plushie to his chest and tried to ignore the sounds from downstairs. The Crafts were watching the TV.

Burning came from Tommy's left wrist, his tattoo, and he flinched. For fuck's sake. He buried himself under his covers and screwed his eyes shut. There was no point in delaying the inevitable.

As soon as his consciousness withdrew, he was there again. In the void. It was normally just black, filled with nothing. But this time, tall brick walls, adorned with vines of all lengths and green shades, stood around him. Tommy was in some sort of puzzle or maze. He shoved at the walls, hoping they were illusions or hallucinations of his, to no avail. He was trapped. That was until a green pathway materialised beneath his feet, ruining the opaque darkness and claustrophobia.

With his head and heart pounding, he followed it. Regret flooded through him as he reached a dead-end. Not because he was trapped again, but because of who was there waiting for him.

A masked man appeared in front of him. An amulet of the same symbol that burdened his wrist hung around the deity's neck.

“What the fuck do you want this time, Dream?”

The masked man smiled.

Chapter End Notes

disclaimer btw:

the people portrayed in Tommy's first life are roughly based on the DreamSMP, however the characterisations are not the same! Some may be slightly accurate to the lore but others not so much! So some characters are aged up, removed in general, vilified etc. Just wanted to say :D

Chapter 2

With hindsight, Tommy regretted falling asleep in jeans. It was bad enough that he woke up in a cold sweat, thanks to Dream and his nightmare fuelling mask, but waking up and not being able to feel his legs was where he drew the line.

Rubbing the sleep out of his eyes, Tommy sat up and grabbed his notebook. Every time Dream visited, he updated his file on him. From the numerous visits, the prominent notes he always wrote down each time were:

Dream's still an asshole who exploits his Godhood to annoy me. He won't take off that stupid mask.

He didn't get why Dream wore it. He had seen his real face, and boy was he glad Dream covered it up. He wasn't ugly or anything (he kinda was) but it was more what his face represented, what that humanised person *did* to him in his first life, when Tommy was at his absolute lowest, hoping for someone to just care for him and- nope. No, it was because Dream was ugly underneath it. That was why he was glad. No other reason.

Anyway, despite how Tommy would usually write that, he didn't this time. For once in the void, Dream wasn't an asshole. But he wasn't nice either. It was creepy, how Dream seemed *excited*, almost happy at Tommy's recent predicament.

Dream said this life would be more fun. He didn't specify who it would be fun for, me or him. But he kept laughing. ~~It scared me.~~ He must like the myth he picked for me.

Tommy stopped writing and glanced at the clock on the bedside table. It was late morning. He'd rather not start the day with writing any more bullshit about the green bastard.

Ignoring the aches in his legs, Tommy headed towards the bathroom, the sign saying 'shitters be shitting' on the door made it clear. The door opened and a tall body bumped into him.

"Oh, uh good morning," Wilbur said.

"Morning," he replied. He waited for Wilbur to move away from the bathroom, but he didn't.

"I don't exactly know how to deal with children." If Tommy wasn't so tired, he would've beaten the shit out of him—and won, obviously—but that was just another thing to blame Dream for.

"I'm not a fucking child."

"Exhibit A."

"Shut up." Wilbur appeared amused at this entire thing. "Can you get out of the way so I can take a shit, or would you prefer watching me do it? Because if you take the second option, that's a bit weird of you—"

“Exhibit B.”

It was too early for this shit. His stomach quenched in hunger. Maybe Wilbur could be useful.

“Is your family the type to force everyone to sit down and have breakfast or can I just take food and eat it upstairs?” he asked, not caring at Wilbur’s surprise at the conversation change.

“We used to have family meals,” Wilbur thread his hands through his hair, “But yeah, I guess it would be convenient to have them again. Come downstairs in a bit, we can have breakfast.”

“Cool.” Wilbur took that as his leave and finally moved away from the bathroom.

After Tommy finished his time in the bathroom, he walked down the stairs. They noticed his arrival in the kitchen. Phil greeted him as he made toast, wearing the greenest dressing gown Tommy had ever seen before, and Wilbur, unbothered, continued to grab jams from the top cupboard. He supposed the table with a cereal bowl in front of one of the chairs was the chosen table today. Fucking Tories and their two different types of dining tables.

He didn’t know if this family had a hierarchy of who sat in each chair, but he didn’t care. He was sitting at the head of the table and no one could do anything about it. His tiredness sabotaged his normal self-preservation.

Wilbur sat to his right and Phil to his left. Phil placed toast in the middle of the table. If awkward could be described as a moment, it would be this. Tommy acted on impulse half the time—correction, all of the time—and did things without thinking, but in this house, he felt constant judgement. He didn’t care about other people’s opinions of him (that was a lie), yet here, he weirdly did. Perhaps it was because this house was older, no younger siblings to take the attention off him, no crying babies to fill up the silence.

He was the youngest and hated it.

“How’d you sleep? You looked tired last night,” Phil asked as Tommy put slices of toast onto his plate.

“I slept alright. A bit hot though, suicide prevention windows will do that to you.” Okay, maybe he needed to tone it down. The eyes practically bugging out of Phil’s head were enough evidence for this.

Wilbur choked on his cereal, “I need a drink.”

“No alcohol.”

“I don’t think I can get through this conversation without it.” To Tommy’s dismay, Wilbur didn’t grab alcohol from the fridge, which would have made this family breakfast even more entertaining. Instead, he grabbed a White Monster... at ten o’clock in the morning?

Techno chose this moment to come downstairs. Fortunately, he was no longer wearing the Minecraft pig slippers.

“Oh, you’re up early,” Phil said to him.

“I’m getting coffee at the café, Niki has an early shift.”

White Monster still in hand, Wilbur shoved Techno by the shoulders into the seat next to him, “Nope. Sit your arse down and drink Dad’s Poundland coffee. This is a family breakfast.”

“Poundland? Seriously?” Hearing an American say that was the worst thing to ever happen in Tommy’s life. Well, if you disregard the cycle of dying on his loved ones, which is pretty hard to disregard from his experience, then it was the worst.

“I’m sorry that Walmart is on the opposite side of the world—” Techno interrupted Phil with what Tommy assumed was an attempt at a ‘bruh’ but the lack of energy made it a pathetic groan. “Just because we have money doesn’t mean Waitrose is the place to get coffee.”

Wilbur nodded, way too vigorously in Tommy’s opinion, “Yes, we need to humble ourselves. Living in a privileged neighbourhood with no financial insecurity will go to our heads.”

“I could humble you right now by kicking you out of the house,” Phil said.

“You would never.” Phil’s lack of response caused Wilbur to take another painful sip of his drink.

Tommy picked at his breakfast, not really knowing what to do. This didn’t have an atmosphere of a family meal or even a family at all. More like a group of friends with a family dynamic, but Tommy was the outsider here, watching in on their inside jokes. He could either join their banter and thrive off their awkwardness towards him or eat the burnt toast. His stomach answered the dilemma for him.

As Techno sluggishly got up to make coffee, Phil turned all his attention onto Tommy.

“Since we’re all here, it’s a good time to go through the rules in this house.” Tommy’s legs bounced under the table. “It’s nothing bad, just basic things. There are chores you’ll need to do but not for now, since you’re still getting settled in. Curfew is nine o’clock and tells me where you go beforehand, and no illegal shit.”

Wilbur’s scoff wiped out Phil’s serious demeanour in seconds.

“Shut.” Wilbur grinned at him, “Oh yeah and don’t go in Wilbur’s shed.”

“What’s in his shed?” Tommy asked, “What, you like a murderer or some shit?”

Techno sat back down. “Would that be such a bad thing?”

“Do I need to explain morality to you again?” This sounded like this was a common occurrence. Techno shrugged and stirred his coffee.

Phil continued, “Anyway, Tommy, is there anything we can do to make you feel more welcome and comfortable? Ignoring anything Will and Techno say might help with that.”

Tommy narrowed his eyes at the man. He’d never been asked this before. He debated taking this seriously or not.

“Child abuse and neglect makes me pretty uncomfortable. So maybe don’t do that.”

The abruptness must have caught Techno off guard, seeing how he spat his coffee back into the cup. Phil sighed into his hands.

“So you admit you’re a child now,” Wilbur said.

“Only when it’s convenient for me.”

“Mate, you don’t have to worry about any of that in this house.” Tommy looked over at Wilbur and Techno, who both gave him a thumbs up. That was not a response he expected.

“Oh, also, we need to go shopping. I don’t think one t-shirt and jeans are enough for you, plus you need other essentials.”

The memory of unwillingly vlogging a clothing haul came to his mind and he’d rather die than go clothes shopping again. All thanks to the Morrison family.

“Can I do clothes shopping online?”

It was a weird request, but Phil for some reason didn’t deny it, “Yeah that’s fine. We’ll go out for essential stuff later today.”

The rest of the family breakfast carried on in peace. Kinda, apart from when Wilbur spilt his drink over the table and Techno somehow dropped his toast on the floor.

Car rides with Phil were more enjoyable than with Linda, which was ironic as Tommy hated being in close quarters with the man who looked exactly like his father. Linda was that much of a dickhead.

Tommy spent most of the journey staring out the window. Snowchester, despite having no snow, was pretty.

“Sorry if it’s been awkward for you so far, we haven’t fostered or adopted anyone since Techno,” Phil said, disturbing Tommy’s count of how many fucking trees this town had.

He wanted to ask why Phil suddenly decided to foster again. There had to be a reason why. Maybe Techno wasn’t the child he really wanted but adopted anyway, hoping that he’d

change, and because he never did, he'd try again with another child. Yet, Techno seemed cool enough. Maybe someone died and the house needed a replacement, or the Craft's had a saviour complex and desired to fix the most problematic children. Or they needed the money; Tommy quickly ruled this idea out since Phil was about to spend money on him today.

Instead, Tommy asked, "Is Techno his actual name?"

"No, it's Technoblade the Third." Fucking what?

"You're taking the piss," Tommy looked at him, trying to find anything in Phil's face to up his 'bullshit-metre'.

"I wish I was."

"Not only is there one of them, but three?" Tommy couldn't grasp the idea of naming your child after a music genre and synonym for a knife, "Take them all out, Jesus."

"Why'd you think he was up for adoption?"

"Oh." He shouldn't find this funny. Tommy, trying to find a sympathetic bone in his body, tried to bite back a laugh. Keyword: tried. He burst out laughing and Phil surprisingly joined in. Okay, this family was alright.

When they reached the shopping centre, Phil appeared more affected by the crowd than he did. But the poorly hidden glances Phil aimed in his direction made it obvious he was more worried about the effect it had on Tommy. To be honest, Phil didn't need to be concerned.

Rather than having anxiety harrow in his chest, Tommy had the opposite. Tranquillity composed his mind; he felt at home. The reason he was so calm was worrying though. The environment of sheers amounts of people pushing and shoving reminded him of the battlefield. Surrounded by soldiers, shouts of patriarchy and revolution, a drawn weapon in his hand, fighting for freedom with his friends. If he closed his eyes and lost himself to the masses, he could almost picture his big brother leading them to victory, or rather, to their eventual deaths.

Phil tugging on his arm broke him from this illusion. A piece of him wanted to stay there for a little while more. But he knew that if he did, he'd remember a lot more than just the proud smile his brother gave him.

"You alright?" Phil's voice drowned in the noise of the busy shopping centre, but Tommy nodded at him anyway and blindly followed the man.

The first shop was W.H Smiths. There was not much interesting about buying pens that were priced more than they should be. Besides the part where Phil laughed at his pain. He asked Tommy if he wanted a hot pink notepad. Nothing was wrong with pink, but hot pink was a vile fucking colour. It was the colour of a migraine and absolutely didn't deserve the right to be a shade.

Tesco's wasn't any better. Apparently, Lynx Africa wasn't a good deodorant to get, but Phil's disappointing stare didn't stop Tommy from buying it. So far, Phil hadn't spent that much money on him. He kept count of the amount, which was a habit he was never able to drop, blame two past lives of poverty (cheers Dream for that, you dick). But then Phil directed him over to the technology part of Tesco's and the money amount skyrocketed.

Phil wanted to buy Tommy a phone. A phone. Holy shit. Sure, he knew how phones worked but he'd never had one to himself, his own privacy.

"You're a teenager, it's essential," Phil said, noticing the blatant shock on Tommy's face.

As Phil sorted out his phone, Tommy made it his mission to touch every single piece of technology around him. Even the grandma phones. Anything with a screen or keyboard was at the mercy of Tommy Soot, well, Tommy Idelle in this life.

"I've put everyone's numbers already in the contacts, in case you need any of us."

Tommy immediately went to the messaging apps, "Please don't tell me there's a family group chat."

"There is one but it's just Wilbur sending Reddit links at three in the morning and that time we needed to find Techno when we lost him in the toy store."

"How old was he when that happened?"

"That was last week."

Despite being in the same position he was in on the car ride there, staring through the window, Tommy was less tense on the way back to the house. The close quarters bothered him, but not as much as it did before. It was more obvious to him now that Phil was not the same person as his father; the only similarity was his appearance and nothing else. Still though, the man made him nervous, the whole foster family did. There were no red flags (besides the mystery around Wilbur's shed) and no absurd rules. It confused him. He *should* feel safe, but he didn't. Not completely.

Phil offered to take Tommy's new things to his room when they got back and told him to make himself some lunch. Now, Tommy was no chef, but he was an expert at making sandwiches.

While eating the best fucking sandwich Tommy had ever made, he noticed Techno sitting on the sofa furthest away from any social interaction with a book in his hands and noise-cancelling headphones on. Why did the fact that he, as a young adult, got lost in a toy store and was called Technoblade the Third, add to his mysterious aura rather than take away from it?

Regardless, next on the agenda was online shopping. Tommy stood outside Wilbur's room and dreaded knocking on it. So he just burst into the room unannounced.

"Phil said I can—" a very *manly* scream cut him off.

Look, he didn't mean to scare the shit out of Wilbur—maybe he did just a little bit—but Tommy took the American phrase 'rip off the band-aid' literally and that so happened to include jump scaring tall men in their own bedrooms.

"What the fuck," Wilbur exclaimed, still recovering from the scare that knocked twenty years off his lifespan.

"Phil said I can use your PC to shop for clothes."

"Yeah, I know that but why the fuck didn't you knock?" Wilbur seemed to be milking this; the hand clasping over his heart was a bit too much.

"I'll keep that in mind next time, anyway, PC time."

As Wilbur turned on his computer, Tommy observed his room. Wilbur's room, to put it simply, was a fucking mess. Explosions could have gone off in here for all Tommy knew, and he had a lot of experience with that. There were water bottles scattered along the windowsill, all at different drinking levels, and a pile of clothes at the side of his bed. An acoustic guitar leaned against the wall, which was plastered with different indie and alternative band posters; a Hamilton poster was at the centre. A picture frame laid facing down on his bedside table, right next to another bottle of water.

Tommy sat at Wilbur's desk and waited for Wilbur to do something like sit on his bed or go downstairs, but nope. The fucker pulled out another chair and sat down next to him.

"You have no style. I'm helping. Think of this as charity work."

"I have style," Tommy said, offended.

"You need more than one shirt to prove you have style."

Ignoring the outright lies, Tommy clicked on a new tab on Google. But he couldn't help but notice the other tabs that Wilbur had open, specifically the different tabs about accounts called 'Sally Salmon' on Instagram, Facebook and even Pinterest.

"Uh, Wilbur, why are you stalking someone called Sally—" Wilbur rushed to close them all down and opened up a new window.

"You saw nothing."

"You simp."

"Shut the fuck up."

As Wilbur's face became redder, Tommy found a clothes site that looked promising. Wilbur kept pestering him at every piece of clothing he clicked on. Thankfully, the red and white Raglan t-shirt, which just resonated with him, survived Wilbur's attempts of deleting it from his basket.

"You know, there's more to life than blue jeans," Wilbur said, probably because of how Tommy was browsing nothing but the jeans part of the 'bottoms' section.

"You're right," Tommy replied, giving Wilbur just a piece of hope before destroying it all, "I want black jeans too."

"For fuck's sake." Tommy smiled to himself.

After he finished shopping and everything was bought, Wilbur was seconds away from dying of disappointment and shame. "What about merch? You like any musicians?"

Tommy shook his head, "I don't really listen to music."

That was the wrong answer.

"Nope! No, get out of my fucking room. That was the last straw, we're done here. Just get out," Wilbur shoved him out, pushing harder when Tommy laughed.

The door slammed shut on his face and in his opinion, online shopping went well.

He headed back into his room to see the shopping bags from earlier on the desk. But his heart stopped at the sight of the items that laid on the end of his bed.

A school uniform.

He had school tomorrow.

Chapter 3

Tommy's morning began with a rough start.

He woke up and Henry, his cow plushie, had fallen on the floor and he always felt guilty when that happened, and then he didn't end up slipping and cracking his head open in the shower, which would have saved him from having to go to school.

Even though he was practically immortal (he used that term in full confidence, especially as that car that hit him last year should have murdered him) since only the myths could kill him, it was the thought that counted. Speaking of myths, he hadn't made any progress of what myth he currently had either. His headspace was too focused on the past, which was probably due to how this foster family had too many resemblances to his other myths.

He could never fight off the thoughts of his past lives or their myths when in the shower. The water tormented him, acting as if it didn't remind him of his disfigured and marked skin with every wet drop. There was no moment where the scars, the *memories*, of Theseus, Icarus and Orpheus could be forgotten. Although he didn't experience the pain of the wounds, or even the healing process, as he was reborn with them attached to his body, he couldn't ignore the discomfort the scars brought.

He wrapped a towel around his waist and hoped the rest of the day would go okay. And because the Gods were never on his side, the second he opened the bathroom door, it all went to shit.

As soon as Tommy walked into the corridor, Techno just *had* to exit his room.

The once timid air around him sharpened and prickled against his skin; vulnerability encased his exposed body. The scrutinising stare from Techno didn't help the weighted fear held against his chest. He felt as if were on display, an exhibit in a museum, *see the cursed child! Don't poke the glass.*

At that moment, nothing stopped Techno from knowing every flaw his skin flaunted.

Instead of resorting to swears or phrases to gain control of the situation so the awaiting panic attack wouldn't hit him in front of a man he had met two days prior, Tommy ran into his room, closing the door behind him.

It took everything in him not to crumble into his bedsheets and stay there until the end of time (which so happened to be in a couple of months for him). The desire to bury and delude himself, to neglect the truth of reality, overwhelmed him. Just like he did in his last life. When his own head deceived him to the point where he remained oblivious to the weight of the dead body lying in his arms and forgot about *her*.

His face reddened and his eyes burned. He shouldn't do that again. The smell of a rotting corpse and the cracking of dried blood on his arms forcing him back into reality did more damage than the original loss. He *couldn't* do that again.

With the harrowing sound of knocking coming from his door, Tommy accepted defeat.

Bracing himself, Tommy wrapped a blanket around his shoulders and opened the door. A disgruntled Techno stood in front of him.

“How’d do?” Tommy said, his voice cracked but he’d rather pretend that did not happen.

“This wasn’t on your file.”

Knowing what Techno was referring to, Tommy bit on the inside of his cheek. He remembered Linda telling them about his scars, but when you hear that, you don’t think of ‘oh a third-degree burn on your shoulder, slashes across your stomach that look like a wild pack of dogs ripped you to pieces and a massive skid mark down your back’. Truth be told, Linda didn’t know the extent of his scars. He kept them hidden, but obviously, not hidden enough.

“Don’t tell Phil.”

“Why not?” Techno asked.

Tommy glared at him. “He’ll ask questions that I don’t want to answer.”

“What if I have questions?”

Tommy stayed silent and let the sickness pool in his stomach. He didn’t want to do this.

“Alright, dickhead. You can ask one question but then you can’t tell anyone about this.”

There was no logic in even offering Techno a question, but the gleam in Techno’s eyes told him that he wouldn’t drop this.

“What happened to your torso?”

Orpheus. Why the fuck did he have to ask about Orpheus? Why not the burns on his shoulders, why not Icarus? Why did it have to be *that*?

Tommy didn’t know what to say. If he explained how Deo died, how he actually died, then Techno would know this didn’t happen during this century. After all, how do you say that your friend died of a disease that had been declared eradicated since the 1980s?

Just thinking about it made the claw marks on his torso sting.

“My friend was dying. I tried everything to save him, *everything*,” bloodletting, quackery, even fucking variolation, “but my lack of faith and impatience killed him instead.”

It was impossible to forget the disappointed pity he received from the Wise Woman in his village when he told her he didn’t take her advice, that he didn’t just wait and treat the symptoms of smallpox rather than doing what the doctors told the rich. They couldn’t even give Deo a funeral.

“That doesn’t explain why you look like you survived a lycanthropes attack.” It wasn’t his fault that his myth decided to get torn to shit by Dionysus followers years after Eurydice died. That ‘L’ wasn’t taken by him.

“Then your question should’ve been more specific. Now, can you fuck off and let me get changed in peace?”

Techno looked more disgruntled than before, dissatisfied with an answer that was as honest as Tommy could give. His stare dipped down to Tommy’s exposed wrist, his tattoo.

“Why do you have a tattoo of Zagreus?”

Tommy flinched. Dream’s real name always did this to him. The reminder that Dream was a God and chose to torture him, making him a special case, a pastime to laugh at. As if a Greek God, son of Zeus and Persephone, who was millenniums years old, couldn’t find a source of entertainment elsewhere.

Dream’s cackles that engulfed the empty void plagued Tommy’s ears, the same cackles the God released as a Tommy who had just experienced death for the first time begged for an explanation, pleaded for his big brother to come and save him from this vile man. Tears fell down his face and all Dream said in response was that this was a punishment, the consequence of what he did to his *patron*.

“I said fuck off.”

He slammed the door shut and let his agony pour through him.

Thankfully, breakfast didn’t involve having any more of Tommy’s past being brought up. He sat at the head of the table, stabbing his fried egg with his fork as the others talked amongst themselves. He appreciated Techno pretending as if nothing had happened, even though his method was just ignoring Tommy’s general existence at the table.

“Techno, stop glaring at Wilbur,” Phil spoke louder than he did before, alerting Tommy of their conversation.

“It’s Monday,” Techno said, “and I’m waiting.”

Realisation sprung onto Phil’s face, followed by annoyance, “Of course. Get on with it, Will.”

“You don’t sound excited about my weekly update,” Wilbur stated. He scowled at his family, but the amused glint in his eyes sabotaged his expression. “Now, Tommy, as you are new here, this will be your first update. Treasure it. And it is something you need to look forward to each week.”

“Get on with it,” Phil repeated.

“So, my Spotify clout is growing.” That is not what Tommy expected to hear. “Most of my playlists have gotten more likes, with the highest being twenty-seven on my ‘songs you play when The Boys™ get in the car’ playlist.”

Wilbur went on more about the Spotify algorithm and his weirdly named playlists than Tommy would’ve liked (what the fuck was an incel anyway?). He didn’t even know Spotify had an algorithm and he wasn’t so sure it could be exploited for playlist exposure.

“That’s nice to hear, Will,” Phil said with his voice conveying the exact opposite. “Onto more important stuff though, Tommy I printed out your school timetable.”

He’d prefer Spotify talk to school bullshit.

Phil handed him a sheet of paper across the table and Tommy squinted at what he read, “Why have I got physical education lessons? I thought they stopped in year eleven.”

“I thought that was one of your chosen subjects, like music.” Tommy shook his head.

“Oh my God, you have to do P.E.” Wilbur tried to smother his delight at Tommy’s suffering with his hand.

“Die.”

“Aw, I didn’t release we were at the death threats point in our bond.”

“Shut the fuck up,” Tommy quipped back, stabbing his egg again.

“It’s just runnin’ around a field for an hour, why is it even a qualification?” Techno asked.

Wilbur continued grinning at Tommy. “You need to know about lactic acid and shit.”

“When I die from exercise and take lactic acid—” Tommy ignored Wilbur’s interjection that lactic acid wasn’t a drug, “—I am going to place all the blame on Phil Craft. I will get Linda to sue you.”

“Dad, no fix it. I don’t want to see Linda Smith ever again.”

“I’d rather do P.E than Spanish, to be honest,” Tommy said, noticing the absence of the lesson in his timetable.

“Then you can’t blame me when you die from exercise,” Phil replied, looking smug as Tommy gripped harder on his fork. The audacity of this old man.

“No me gusta.”

“Stop speaking broken Spanish and hurry up with your food, we’re leaving soon,” Wilbur said as he stood up to put his plate in the sink.

“We?”

“Yes, we. I have school too.”

Tommy was confused. No offence to Wilbur—full offence, actually—but he looked like he was in his middle twenties, similar to Techno’s age, if not younger.

“You’re still in secondary school?”

“I’m a year thirteen resit. Let me live.” So he was eighteen or nineteen, either way, old as fuck.

It was Tommy’s turn to laugh at Wilbur’s suffering. Avoiding a hit to the head, Tommy ducked and quickly ate the rest of his breakfast.

After that horrific car ride, Tommy now understood how Wilbur failed his driving test five times. Still feeling the effects of being in a car with a man who shouted out a range of numbered points every time he *could have* hit someone, Tommy followed Wilbur through the school gates.

“That building is the entrance to the main school and reception looks like the drive-through window for McDonald’s, easy to find.” Wilbur grabbed his lanyard from his bag and hung it around his neck. “Now, you go on and have an embarrassing and socially awkward first day at school and I’ll see you back here at three o’clock.”

Wilbur walked off and greeted another sixth form student, an average height (but tiny when stood next to Wilbur) girl with dyed pink hair. What the fuck was up with this town and pink hair?

Tommy had gone to two schools in this life, and they were far better than the ones in the 1970s and the *attempt* of an education he had in France (secondary schools were established in larger cities, but fuck learning about modern sciences in a time when they believed bad air caused disease rather than bacteria). Despite that, Tommy didn’t like these schools; he didn’t appreciate being barged into in corridors and called ‘pussio’.

Regardless, Tommy proceeded to the reception that was apparently a knockoff McDonald’s window. He humbly disagreed with Wilbur on this comparison since reception instead looked like those rundown Subway shops placed at petrol stations.

The only difference to an actual petrol station Subway was that there usually wasn’t a boy who looked like a year seven—if it wasn’t for the red badge on his blazer indicating he was in year eleven, Tommy never would’ve known—in there. McDonald’s, sure, but not Subway. Tommy wondered during the car ride here why this school had coloured badges for different years, but it wouldn’t surprise him if this kid was the sole reason why. He looked twelve and

not fifteen or sixteen. It didn't help that the guy wore his school uniform like a pre-schooler either, the fucking buttons weren't even buttoned up properly, his tie was inside out and there was more mud on his trousers than fabric.

Tommy closed the reception door behind him, alerting the guy that he was there. A look of pain came across the boy's face, almost wishing that social interaction didn't exist and maybe that Tommy didn't exist either.

"You must be Tommy, I'm Tubbo," the boy said, and the name weirdly fit him, "I was, uh, assigned to show you around the school on your first day."

"How many good behaviour points are you getting for this shit?" Tommy asked. The reluctance of this entire ordeal was obvious from the other boy.

"A lot," Tubbo said, "I'm saving up for an Amazon gift card."

"Why?"

"If it's the school's money, my parents will let me buy this stainless steel knife set." What the fuck? Now Tommy didn't judge on appearances, but this guy looked like he'd prefer to buy stuffed animals online and not fucking weapons.

"You could buy anything, and you want that?"

"They have rainbow titanium coating. It's worth it."

Perplexed by this conversation, Tommy just nodded at him. Maybe if they were red coating, he'd understand the commitment.

There was an old woman behind the reception counter, but she ignored him—that or her old age affected her ears and she genuinely didn't know he was there. Either way, Tommy's first introduction to this school was a short kid covered in mud with a liking for rainbow knives. With this town, he didn't expect anything less.

"Can I have a look at your timetable before I take you to form?" Tommy gave it to him and Tubbo looked up at him with disgust, "You willingly chose P.E?"

Not wanting to relive the teasing he received earlier from Wilbur, Tommy took it with stride, "I have a God complex."

"I have no idea what that means."

"Me neither." Tommy beamed at the boy's bewilderment. "Anyway, where's form?"

Tubbo's commentary on all the things they walk past whilst on the way to form was... educational to say the least. He learnt to avoid drinking from the water fountains unless you wanted cholera and to not sit on the school heaters unless you want 'beef' with the year

nines, who have nowhere else to go at break or lunch. Also, Tubbo shared music with him, so he wouldn't be alone for that class.

Most interestingly though, was when the two walked into their form room and a random girl said to Tubbo, "Good morning, bee boy."

Apparently if you mention that you like bees *once* in year eight, that shit happens. Tubbo didn't even know the girl.

His first lesson was history and fortunately, Tubbo had that class as well. No need for awkward introductions to other students then, he'd just latch onto this one guy for the entire day.

However, the liveliness he had from his conversations with Tubbo in form died the minute he entered his history classroom. Flags that meant death, false freedom, and blood to him were paraded on the display boards upon the walls, with shitty lesson work plastered below it. The same colours that once brought a newfound nation together and fuelled misplaced patriotism were reduced to a classroom accessory.

He sat down next to Tubbo, trying to calm the shaking in his legs. His right hand gripped onto his tattooed wrist, wishing that *this* wasn't what Dream meant by making this life exciting. The tightness in his throat and heat against his neck worsened as Tubbo pushed his textbook between them. The title mocked him, everything became muffled as the words sunk in.

The L'Manberg Revolution and Greater Essempi Wars: 1521-1537.

He faintly registered Tubbo talking to him, and that five, maybe even ten minutes had passed, but nothing mattered. Nothing mattered but the glaring textbook placed in front of him. The book had been opened to a page, exposing his watering eyes to more text about his first life, about *Theseus*.

As he recognised the content on the page, his world collapsed. A scanned picture of his *notebook*, of the same message he read before going to sleep, laid on the page. It was almost untranslatable, sabotaged by time, yet he could recognise his own brother's handwriting anywhere. He read the caption at the top and the bile rising up his throat tasted bitter. 'W. Soot's only recorded message.'

If they had printed a stupid note his brother had written, which had no historical meaning, then what else did they print?

There were diary entries he made whilst he was *there*. There was personal shit, meant for no one else's eyes, when he was desperate for someone to just listen to him, to care about how he felt, and his conflict when someone finally did care, only for that to end badly as well.

He should have known from the beginning that his notebook wasn't normal. He didn't know where it came from, but it didn't leave his side. Even the days where he woke up drowning with his notebook in his bag, the pages never ruined. Well, it must have lost its magical properties after he died.

He turned to a random page and his own written words were enough.

It's never my time to die.

Tommy raised his hand. "I need to go to the bathroom."

The teacher nodded at him, said something about allowing it since he was new, but he didn't care. He moved out of his chair, trying to compose the trembling in his legs and the pounding in his head. He just needed to get out of that room, away from those words.

His deathly grip on the bathroom sink tightened as tears pricked in his eyes. A part of him wished for the sink to break into pieces, to cut at his skin and shatter in his hands. Anything to distract him from the memories of where he'd climb his stone towers and stand over the edge, letting the harsh gusts of wind decide his fate.

His tattoo stung and he clawed at it, hoping that Dream felt his pain by extension. As his back slid down the wall, Tommy held his head in his hands and a sob echoed the room. He could never escape it, escape *him*, escape his past.

He didn't know how much time had passed, but it was enough that the teacher would notice his absence.

He sat back down, avoiding eye contact with anyone who noticed his puffy face and red nose. Tubbo tapped on his shoulder.

"You okay, man?"

He wanted to scoff at that question. He wanted to say the truth, the words at the tip of his tongue.

"No. You have to revise and write essays about the same events that ripped apart my family, murdered my brother, destroyed any friendships and ounces of trust I had left, and killed me. I am not fucking okay."

But he didn't say that. He couldn't.

He sucked up all the self-pity he had and attempted to smile at the boy next to him, "Yeah, I'm fine. Just a bit nervous, first day and all."

"Understandable. If you're worried about not making friends or stuff like that, I think you're pretty chill."

Tommy nodded and the forced smile on his face felt a bit more real.

Tommy could finally swallow without tasting bitterness in his throat when break time came around. The previous sobs that wrecked his throat elapsed as he enjoyed Tubbo's company in the school canteen.

"So do you hang out with anyone else?" Tommy asked as he picked at the sandwich Phil made for him.

"Yeah, this guy called Ranboo, but he's not in today," Tubbo said, "He was playing an emotional game until five in the morning. I woke up to him calling me whilst he cried over some characters called Chloe and Max. I don't know."

Tommy snorted, recognising the game, "Damn, what a pussy crying over Life is Strange."

"He wants me to play it with him, but I think that's just his excuse to see me cry."

A person in the line for food caught his eye, stopping him from commenting on Tubbo's strange friend. Wilbur, noticing him, flipped Tommy off. So Tommy did the most polite and mature thing he could have done and did the same back.

"You know Wilbur?" he looked at Tubbo and paused. Tubbo didn't seem like the assholes who would take the piss out of foster kids.

"I'm staying with him for a while."

"You're related to Philza Minecraft? Holy shit." Tommy didn't know where this sudden excitement came from.

"What? No, I'm being fostered by Phil Craft. Is that your nickname for him or something?"

"Dude," Tubbo put down his sandwich for dramatic value, "he created Minecraft."

"No fucking way."

"You didn't know this?"

Tommy shook his head, "You are telling me everything you know about the Craft family."

His shitty morning and introduction to history had soon been forgotten as Tubbo gave him the brightest grin he could muster and began his rant.

His phone buzzed in his pocket as he said goodbye to Tubbo at the end of the school day.

4/3: Family Chat

Wilbur: [image attached] stop speaking to Tubzo and hurry up

Technoblade: Stop taking pictures of children at school.

Wilbur: stfu

Rolling his eyes at the messages, Tommy reached Wilbur at the gate and followed him to his car. Wilbur put on his music with the aux and surprisingly, it wasn't that bad. Nothing beat bardcore Medieval covers though.

As subtly as possible, Tommy wrote down some of the lyrics in his notebook so he could find the song later. The thought crossed his mind that this would be a permanent mark in his notebook, something that no matter the amount of crossing out would still be there. He didn't mind that.

"You're fitting in better than I thought you would on the first day," Wilbur said as he narrowly avoided running over one of the year sevens who crossed the road without looking. "Techno didn't speak a word to anyone for a week just to establish a mysterious persona."

"Did it work?"

"Yeah, they were shit scared of him." Tommy shared the feeling. "He beat up some kids which solidified the entire thing."

"Well, I found a Tubbo," he said with a proud smile.

"You sure did. Nice choice, he's like his sister. He won't let you go now."

"Who's his sister?"

"Niki. Pink hair, German accent, very throwable." Wilbur didn't expand on that.

When they got home, the biggest mystery of the Craft house was solved. With Phil, paperwork and laptop in his hands, on the second dining table that Tommy hadn't eaten on yet, it all made sense. That dining table was for work-related business. It did confirm though, to Tommy's dislike, that the Crafts had some Tory in them though.

Phil looked up from his laptop and greeted them, "How was school?"

Tommy ignored his question and channelled all the built-up emotions he'd had all day, "You created Minecraft? You named a game after yourself? How egotistical and selfish are you? And you didn't even tell me—"

"Would you have preferred Cave Game?" Phil asked, not bothered by the loudness Tommy created.

“I take it back. Be as selfish as your heart desires Mr Minecraft.”

Wilbur threw his bag on the sofa and Tommy noticed his calm attitude had changed since he exited the car.

“Where’s Technoblade? I need to show him something.” Even his voice had changed.

“He’s picked up another shift at the library. What do you need to show him anyway?” Phil asked.

“Nothing. I’ll be in the shed.”

Without another word, Wilbur stalked out the room and left a bewildered Phil behind. Not liking the silence, Tommy sat down opposite him.

“I made a friend today.” He had no idea why he said that. Except he did, but that didn’t mean he approved of it. He didn’t like the inkling of hurt and muffled confusion on Phil’s face. Fuck, what was this house doing to him? He’d been there for not even three whole days and he was already succumbing to the pressure of human emotion.

“That’s good,” the hurt on Phil’s face dissipated, “Did you end up dying in P.E?”

“Nope, didn’t have it today. We should both be thankful for that.”

“That better not be a threat—”

“Anyway, I have an idea for funny Minecraft mods.”

“No.” Phil disagreed a bit too soon for Tommy’s likings.

“What if,” Tommy started, not deterred, “every time you killed a mob, you morphed into them?”

“We are not doing this.”

“You’re right about that. Because *you’re* the one doing it.”

He couldn’t ignore the lightness in his chest as Phil laughed at his suggestions.

After at least an hour of bothering Phil, Tommy was about to leave to get changed out of his shit school uniform but Phil stopped him.

“Before you go, Techno asked me to give you this.”

Tommy frowned as Phil grabbed something from underneath the table. He shoved a book with those of those bows you stick on the top of wrapped presents into Tommy’s hands. It was a child’s introduction to Greek mythology book, with a note attached to it saying:

Figured you liked Greek mythology because of the tattoo.

– Techno

His frown deepened at the book. The *gift*.

“Don’t ask, I don’t get the context either,” Phil said.

Why did Techno give this to him? Maybe it was a peace offering because of this morning. But he preferred a TwitLonger and an apology video for that since those were funnier.

He appreciated the thought, even though he hated Greek mythology. This was a whole new level of irony.

Chapter 4

Now, Tommy didn't *mean* to upset Tubbo. It was the school's fault.

For his timetable to go from maths class to history, the school was just asking for him to press the fire alarm. Sure, it meant all the year groups had to stand on the AstroTurf field in the cold November weather, but it was worth it. Well, ignoring how the headteacher told everyone she'd check the cameras to see who pulled the alarm, Tubbo kept glaring at him, and how he *did* end up having to spend at least half an hour in his history class after all, then it was worth it.

Tubbo didn't agree.

"Why did you choose the one day I didn't bring in a coat to pull that shit?" his new friend had been complaining for the past five minutes about how cold he was, so much that Tommy had to give him his coat. He didn't willingly do this, Tubbo snatched it out of his hands—but he did loosen his grip at the last second.

"If you had to go from learning about quadratic equations to L'Manberg, you'd do the same," Tommy replied as his history teacher, Miss Allingham, wrote the learning objective of the lesson on the whiteboard.

"I was in your maths class, Tommy! I would've had to as well!"

"Well, case closed."

"That doesn't even make sense—"

"Case closed."

With Tubbo huffing more objections to Tommy's astound logic, they both placed their textbooks on the desk. He may have stolen his textbook from the library, but it was justified. He'd never spend money on having to learn about his own fucking history.

So far with these lessons, Tommy managed to get away with blanking out his teacher's words. Instead, he focused on writing messages on the corner of Tubbo's notebook pages—it ranged from insults, swears and the phrase 'bee boy' written in the various languages Tommy knew. Every time Tubbo asked what it meant, Tommy always answered with a different incorrect translation. This didn't bother Tubbo though since he was concentrated on highlighting every vowel in a random passage of text.

The classroom door opening interrupted Tommy's current Romanian translation. A boy with two-toned hair, dyed black and white, walked into the classroom. Tommy guessed that the boy looked unphased about being late; he had to guess since the guy's face was hidden. He wore a face mask and sunglasses. Though, Tommy was more concerned about how the guy had to duck to get through the door in the first place.

Miss Allingham sighed as if this was a common occurrence.

“I got lost on the way back from the AstroTurf,” the boy with a deep American voice said. Great, another fucking American.

“Ranboo you’ve been in this school for four years, how did you get lost?”

“I have memory problems.”

“Yes, and that’s obvious in your classwork.” Tommy grimaced, as much as he hated Americans, that was uncalled for. “Sit down.”

Ranboo sat down at the same table as Tommy and Tubbo, greeting Tubbo with a nod. So this was the guy Tubbo told him about yesterday, the pussy who cried over video games.

“So did you sacrifice Chloe or the town?” Tommy asked, beaming as Ranboo gaped at him—again, Tommy assumed this (the mask covered his mouth).

“I don’t even know your name, but I will punt you.”

“Hi, I’m Tommy and I don’t cry over video games.”

“I’m Ranboo and you’ve made me emotionally unstable at ten o’clock in the morning.”

Tubbo stifled a laugh at their interaction then promptly went back to his highlighting.

Tommy, wanting to understand the enigma of this guy, asked, “Why do you wear the mask and glasses?”

Both Tubbo and Ranboo replied simultaneously:

“He’s quirky like that.”

“I don’t have a mouth.”

He blinked at the pair, questioning all the life choices that led him up to this moment.

“I don’t know what answer is worse.”

Neither of the two explained their responses, which Tommy was grateful for. He returned to doing nothing and ignoring his teacher. She hadn’t called on him yet to answer a question since he was new, and he hoped she never would. Although, he couldn’t help but notice how the teacher would glare at Ranboo whenever her gaze landed on their table at the back. It was weird, especially since Ranboo was the one doing work; it was more Tommy and Tubbo who weren’t doing what they were supposed to (seriously, Tubbo was making a tower with his highlighters and Tommy was on his phone, which he poorly hid behind his pencil case).

“Why does Miss Allingham keep looking at Ranboo as if he murdered her entire family and caused her divorce?” Tommy asked. He didn’t know if she was divorced, but she just gave off that energy.

“Oh, Miss hates him,” Tubbo said.

“Hate is a strong word to use Tubbo,” Ranboo interjected. “It’s more that she despises my existence.”

Tommy stared closely at her and he couldn’t agree more.

“She doesn’t appreciate people challenging her own opinions over the L’Manberg Revolution,” Ranboo explained. “She gave me a fail once because I answered her essay about who was most responsible for the L’Manberg Wars ‘incorrectly’.”

Tommy frowned. How could you answer it incorrectly? It was obviously George’s fault because he was a prick.

“I placed the blame on King George and W. Soot but didn’t bother arguing about the extent to which a child soldier caused the wars.” Oh. Wait, why did he blame his brother?

“He’s a Timmy apologist and Miss is an anti,” Tubbo added.

“You spend too much time on Twitter.”

Tommy was more confused than ever. “Who the fuck is Timmy?”

“He’s W. Soot’s younger brother.”

What in the actual fuck? It was bad enough he had to learn about his first life but the historian fuckers didn’t even get his name right. Timmy, fucking Timmy, what kind of beta male name was that?

With his newfound anger at this town, at the fuckers who got his name wrong, Tommy opened his textbook, red pen in hand, and began to correct every single historical inaccuracy he could find.

His phone vibrating on the table stopped his mental debate over whether or not the book was wrong in not calling Quackity ‘Big Q’. Techno had texted him.

Anime Man:

Technoblade: Did you eat the last waffles this morning?

Tommy: no but Wilbur did.

Technoblade: Slash his car tyres for me when you get back from school.

Tommy: ok, delete your messages so there’s no proof.

Technoblade: The perfect crime.

Blood for the Blood God.

Tommy, knowing full well that he did eat the waffles, grinned to himself. But the grin fell from his face as he recognised the serenity that settled in his chest.

He didn't like this. He didn't like how comfortable he was with these people, these strangers. There was a flaw that stuck with him, no matter where or when he was reborn; he got attached to people easily. But, he never got to the level where he wanted to open up with them, expand his attachment, share his interests and hobbies. Normally, he forced himself to become a wall and entertain the person, keeping the conversations one-sided and living vicariously through them. But it hadn't even been a week and Tommy didn't want to leave this house, these people, and run away like he usually tried to do.

It frightened him.

Oblivious to Tommy's current mental breakdown, Tubbo asked, "Yo, Tommy. Can I have your phone real quick?"

Still preoccupied, he gave it to him. It wasn't until lunch where he noticed two new phone contacts named 'Tubster' and 'Ranboo My Beloved'. He changed Ranboo's but left Tubbo's alone.

His hatred for the stubborn comfortability he had towards the Craft family stuck with him throughout the day. It stayed buried in his stomach on the car ride home. He still stole another one of Wilbur's songs but didn't engage in any conversation Wilbur attempted to make. And by attempted conversations, it was just Wilbur asking Tommy moral questions about if he would purposely crash the car he was driving to avoid killing a bunch of school children. Not a nice topic to have whilst in a car—Tommy said no anyway.

The emotions crippling his stomach somehow worsened when they got home. Although, the chaos in the house did dim it a bit.

"Technoblade, you pig, get the fuck away from my pizza pockets right now!" Wilbur shouted as soon as he entered the house.

Techno, as nonchalant as ever, continued to eat it.

Tommy suddenly left the room when they started arguing, and it was one hundred percent not related to Techno mentioning how Wilbur ate the last waffle this morning. The two chasing each other, followed by someone tripping down the staircase, was not Tommy's problem.

He returned to the kitchen to see Phil by the fridge, mumbling something under his breath about 'chaotic little shits'. Not in the mood for his small talk that normally fletched out into

an hour conversation (it wasn't Tommy's fault that Phil was so easy to talk to), Tommy spoke before Phil could say anything.

"Is it okay if I go out?"

Phil closed the fridge door, surprised at the question. "Yeah, if you want. Are you coming back for dinner?"

"No, I'll eat when I come back."

"Alright, have fun. Remember curfew."

Well, that was easy. In his old house with the vlogging family, he was never allowed to leave unless their older biological son and a camera would come with him.

After he got changed out of his school uniform, Tommy left the house. To be honest, he had no idea where he was going, but Google Maps existed for a reason. It didn't help though that ten minutes into his walk around the neighbourhood, it started raining. Not the nice rain either, but the rain that genuinely hurt your back from how heavy the raindrops were.

Thankfully though, he spotted an open café. He went in, despite him not having any money on him (well, he had money but it wasn't his, stealing from Wilbur was fun). The inside of the café looked like something in Animal Crossing. He sat down in the corner booth and took off his wet jacket. It was busy but not too busy, the rain hitting the windows muffled the tables of conversation.

The girl he kept seeing with Wilbur at school walked towards him, a notepad and pen in her hands.

"Hi, what can I get you?"

He deduced that this was Niki because of her pink hair and German accent. As he picked up the menu, he noticed her staring at his wrist, specifically at his tattoo, with a stumped expression. He rolled down his sleeve, trying to ignore the shiver that crept up his neck, and asked for a hot chocolate.

"You're Will and Techno's new foster brother, aren't you?" Niki asked.

He nodded at her. "You're Niki."

"What gave it away?"

"You look throwable," Tommy said, repeating the words Wilbur used to describe her. She laughed—maybe this was something Wilbur regularly said.

"Well, Tommy, I'll be right back with your order."

She came back with a hot chocolate and a chocolate chip muffin.

"I didn't ask for a muffin—"

“It’s for free. A reward for having to put up with the two of them so far,” she said, smiling at him. But there was more to her smile, an intent he couldn’t place.

“You are the only one to understand my troubles and suffering.”

She left Tommy to his own devices, which so happened to be the homework he had to complete for tomorrow. He pulled out his sheets of homework and immediately placed his maths one back into his bag but kept the English out.

He hated English but less so than maths. Yet, that didn’t mean he was terrible at the subject. There was an advantage of being alive in the century that Shakespearian plays were performed. He preferred learning about the plays in this century though since it acknowledged the patriarchal influence and blatant misogyny. Lady Macbeth was always his favourite character and now he wasn’t alone in this viewing. The girl who sat next to him in English called her a ‘girl boss’, whatever that meant.

He glanced up from his work and the café had fewer people in it and it was dark outside, due to the winter season. Sighing, he packed up his stuff, paid for his hot chocolate and waved goodbye to Niki as he walked out. At least it wasn’t pouring it down raining anymore, just a light drizzle.

He didn’t feel like going home yet, so he explored the park. The reviews on the Google site convinced him to. Apparently the pigeons attack anyone who sat on a specific bench and wanted to put them to the test. When he reached the park, the sky was darker than before.

The statue in the middle of a man-made grass field caught his eye. It was a tall, bronze statue of a man in a medieval-looking suit, similar to the style Tommy wore ages ago. The sculptured man was old and had an eye missing, there was an attempt of indicating scars on his skin.

There was a metal plaque beside the statue. His body froze when he read the name:

Tobias Underscore: 1505-1546.

In front of him stood the adult version of his childhood friend, the same Tobias who was the first person outside Tommy’s family that he loved and trusted, who gave him his green scarf as a token of their friendship, who stuck by his side, held him as he broke down over his brother’s death and reassured him that he wasn’t alone.

It was the same Tobias Underscore who *betrayed* him. The same traitor who exiled him, after all Tommy had done to try to secure peace in the L’Manberg Wars. His first and only best friend who left him to die.

He peered up at the statue once more and he no longer stood in a dark and empty park.

The black walls King George’s men built stung tears in his eyes, the asperity of Tobias’ Presidential suit, which complemented the glower of resentment on his face, faced towards him. He remembered this event, the conference that finalised the split in the years of friendship between the duo who *shouldn’t* be separated. The doe-eyes which months before

had gazed at Tommy with pure adoration and respect, now glared at him, with such hostility that Tommy couldn't stop the shaking in his hands.

"You've messed this up for no one but yourself... you're selfish—"

His first landed against the metal of the statue, followed by another, and another, and another as his knuckles screamed and chest throbbed. He kicked and shoved at Tobias, relishing in the dented metal he caused. The pulsing in his head drowned out his sickening voice, his sickening words that confirmed that Tommy meant *nothing* to him anymore. His tattoo burned, warning him to stop. He threw himself at the statue with a force that would paint his body in bruises. But the statue didn't break, it didn't fall over.

It stood still, unbothered by the relentless abuse Tommy gave it.

He scoffed at the statue, it may not look anything like the Tobias he remembered, but it acted like him. Standing still, unbothered by the relentless abuse Tommy *received*.

The adrenaline left his body and Tommy sagged to the floor, surrendering to the rough pavement on his wounded skin. The blood from his knuckles smudged on his clothes.

"Fuck."

Limping down a dark street did wonders on your ego. Shame riddled in his heart. The shaking in his hands didn't cease on his way home. He had stopped crying at least, but it wasn't even crying—his eyes burned and no tears dampened his face.

He struggled to open the door, his fingers aching with every moment. When he did, he rushed into the bathroom, leaving the light off. He knew the sight he would see, how much of a mess he was. He didn't need a mirror to remind him of that.

After he washed the blood off his top and hands, he exited the bathroom. His body quivered as he moved towards the stairs.

"Tommy, you're home!" Phil's voice came from the kitchen.

For fuck's sake.

"Yeah," his voice cracked, hurting his strained throat. He didn't remember yelling earlier, but he must have.

"Can you help me for a second?"

He bit on his cheek and his nails pinched at his skin. He just wanted to sink into his bed and forget today ever happened.

“Tommy?” Phil called out.

Reluctantly, Tommy staggered into the kitchen, hiding his hands in his pockets.

“What do you need?” Tommy asked, his throat croaking again.

Phil was in front of the kitchen sink with a dirty plate and cleaning brush in his hands. He motioned towards the rack of cleaned plates.

“Could you dry them for me?”

Tommy nodded, facing away from Phil as he grabbed for the dish towel and began what he was told to do. It was silent between them, probably calming for Phil, but it did the opposite for Tommy. Well, that was until Phil leant forward.

“Mate, what happened to your hands?”

This day just got worse and worse.

“Uh,” Tommy stuttered on his own words, “I was mugged.” He couldn’t lie for shit and this was proof of that.

“Mugged by a brick wall?” Phil furrowed his eyebrows in disbelief.

“Yes,” Tommy said. “Wait no.”

Phil placed down what he was holding and turned his full attention to Tommy. “What happened?”

“The brick wall part is kinda true—”

Phil sighed and Tommy clenched his teeth, preparing himself to be shouted at.

“Stay here.”

He quickly returned with a basket of medical supplies and pointed at the table. Tommy sat down, a whimper escaping his lips as his legs ached. Phil reached for his hands and treated the cuts on his knuckles.

“What made you do this?” his voice had softened and Phil stared at him with kindness that Tommy hadn’t experienced in a while.

“The wall insulted me.”

“Did the wall deserve it?”

“Yeah.”

It was obvious now that neither of them was talking about a wall anymore, but a statue wasn’t far off.

“I won’t give you shit for this, but if this continues,” Tommy waited for the ‘I’m sending you back’ speech but it never came, “you’re gonna have to talk to someone about it, like the school counsellor.”

“Will do, Mr Minecraft.” Phil looked at him again, worry evident in his eyes. He let go of Tommy’s bandaged hands—Tommy would never admit that he missed the comfort—and stood up. He walked to the fridge and pulled out a bowl of spaghetti.

“Now, you stay sitting, eat your dinner and tell me about your day whilst I finish the dishes. Did it go badly?”

Something about Phil made Tommy want to tell him everything, yet he couldn’t.

“Yeah, something like that,” he paused. “I met Ranboo.”

“He’s a sweet kid, why do you—”

“Why did God make him so tall?” Tommy knew the mood change in him wasn’t genuine; he tried to bury that awareness. “No, I’m being serious. It’s bad enough he’s American, but he’s a fucking skyscraper.”

Phil huffed out a laugh, “Easier to tackle, then I guess.”

“Philza Minecraft, I like how you think.”

As Phil’s voice helped him forget the bruises forming on his body, it slipped his mind that he had rules about getting attached.

Chapter 5

Tommy had officially been living with the Craft family for a week and it honestly felt longer than that. He had the same feeling with his last foster home as well, but this house was for a different reason. Here, it didn't drone on. Instead, Tommy found himself savouring every moment he had with them, lingering on his enjoyment.

The house was quiet for once and he was on his phone, holding it at an awkward angle since his knuckles still hurt from beating the shit out of a statue (something he very much regretted now). His room didn't share the ease he experienced in this house though, it was still empty and didn't look lived in. No amount of posters or decorations could make it feel like home, not with the suicide prevention windows mocking him every night. All he wanted was for fresh air, he had no intention of using the window as a diving board from the second floor.

"Tommy!" Wilbur burst into his room, causing him to drop the phone in his hands.

"You bitch."

"I require your assistance," Wilbur said, grinning as Tommy tried to regain his breath. He did this occasionally, running into his room without knocking, scaring the shit out of him, ever since Tommy did the same to Wilbur.

"No."

"You haven't even heard what I need you for." Wilbur stood straight and gave Tommy a look that *would have* frightened him if he didn't know how much of a pussy Wilbur was (they both agreed to never speak about the spider incident).

He sighed but let himself be pulled up from his bed and pushed into Wilbur's room.

"Now, I know you like my kind of music, so I need to show you something because Technoblade is being a little bitch at the moment."

"How do you know I like your music?"

"You're not very subtle at stealing my music taste in the car. Next time, use Shazam or something." Wilbur laughed as Tommy's ears reddened. "Awe, you're embarrassed."

"Shut the fuck up." Tommy hit his shoulder and watched Wilbur display his SoundCloud and Spotify accounts on both of his computer monitors.

The various Spotify playlists Wilbur created were on the side of the screen. Tommy stopped reading their titles when he got to the 'POV: water is wet' playlist. Who the fuck names a playlist that?

"Give me your opinion on this song," Wilbur said, clicking on one of his drafted audio files. "A warning though, it's got shitty audio, courtesy of our school's recording equipment."

This didn't surprise him since he'd seen the shitty music equipment the school had, the drum kits were incomplete and the sound of the snare made him want to commit arson, specifically in the music room (every music lesson was hell on his ears).

The song started playing and the trumpet caught him off guard; the song was named 'One Day' and he liked it, despite Wilbur's awful singing—that was a lie but Tommy didn't want to fuel Wilbur's ego.

When Wilbur paused it, Tommy frowned at him. "Is this why you guys don't have a pet?"

"What?"

Tommy leaned over him and replayed the first of couple seconds of the song. "Who killed your cat?"

"I've never had a cat."

Tommy stared at him blankly. "Don't tell me this is some precise metaphor about pussy."

"I never want to hear that word come out of your mouth." The disgust Wilbur expressed didn't answer Tommy's statement though.

He opened his mouth to repeat himself but Wilbur grabbed an empty can of Pringles and waved it around as menacingly as possible. "Don't think I won't hit you."

Rolling his eyes at him, Tommy took hold of the computer mouse and hovered the cursor over a drafted album file. It was titled 'Your City Gave Me Asthma'.

"What's that?" Tommy asked, wondering what the title meant, maybe it shared the same shitty metaphors about pussy.

Wilbur looked back at his computer screen. He ripped the computer mouse out of Tommy's hand and exited out of his SoundCloud account. The previous amusement he had practically drained from his face with unease replacing it.

"Don't ask about that," Wilbur snapped. There was a certain edge to his voice that left Tommy uncomfortable; he didn't expect such hostility over an album. "I'm being serious, don't."

"Okay, okay, Jesus I won't." Tommy raised his hands in surrender, still confused about the entire switch in Wilbur's mood.

A tense silence followed as Wilbur exhaled and rubbed harshly at his face. Tommy fiddled with his hands, not sure what to do.

"Uh, anyway yeah," he began, voice uncertain, "I liked the song you showed me, especially since it started with cat slander." He hoped for the strained atmosphere between them to quickly leave and maybe for the unease in Wilbur to leave as well.

Wilbur, still quiet, rubbed his face again and sighed.

“I take it you’re more of a dog person,” Wilbur said and Tommy nodded. “Good, I don’t think you’d survive in this household if you preferred cats to dogs.”

“Now that you know I steal your music, can I have a look through your playlists?” At the mention of his Spotify playlists, Wilbur sat up straighter, almost as if the life returned to him.

“You’ve come to the right place for song recommendations.”

Tommy smiled to himself, satisfied as a face of joy greeted him.

Tommy had spent the rest of the day listening to the music Wilbur had given him—and fucking hell was there a lot. No wonder he had a band in sixth form, he was obsessed with music. After finally going through all the songs, Tommy was hungry. There was nothing against a snack before going to bed.

He went downstairs and walked into the kitchen. Phil and Techno were currently in the living room, lounging on the sofas whilst watching something on the TV. Tommy stared at the screen and held back a gag as he realised what the two were watching. It was some anime, fucking weeb. Because of this, he made sure to be as loud as possible when searching through the cabinets for a perfect snack.

Techno, bothered by the noise, paused the TV. “Is it possible to orphan an already orphaned child?”

Tommy stopped rustling a random crisp packet and flipped him off. He leaned against the kitchen island counter. “You’d technically need to kill Phil.”

“Nevermind,” Techno huffed, “it’s not worth it.”

Phil narrowed his eyes at him. “I don’t know if I should be offended at that or not.”

Techno shrugged. “That’s up to interpretation.”

Tommy frowned at the pair; the dynamic between them was different to Phil and Wilbur. With Techno and Phil, they acted more like old friends rather than father and son. It was weird.

Rustling the crisp packet again, Tommy took it and some biscuits with him. He circled the kitchen island and was about to stomp his way up the stairs, but Phil saying his name interrupted his plans.

“Do you want to join us?” Phil asked, waving his hand towards an empty sofa.

Before Tommy could answer, Techno said, “Nah, he won’t like this, which is more of a reason for us to make you watch this, but no.”

“Are you gatekeeping weeb shit?” He didn’t know if he was using the word that the girl in English taught him correctly, but he didn’t care.

“I’m not gatekeeping anime,” Techno answered, confused.

“So you’re gaslighting me now.”

“Stop saying words you don’t know the definition to,” Phil said.

“I think what you just said counts as an example of gaslighting,” Techno stated, his mouth upturned at the irritation present on Phil’s face.

“Shut.” This entire situation took years off Phil’s life expectancy. “We’ll put on a simpler anime for you Tommy if you want to join us.”

“If it’s Death Note, I’m leavin’,” Techno said.

“Avatar: The Last Airbender.”

“That isn’t even an anime.”

Phil looked over at Tommy. “If a word starting with the letter ‘g’ leaves your mouth again, I swear to God.”

Tommy scowls, bitter that Phil knew what he was going to say.

“No more buzz words, no more arguing, Tommy sit down.”

He rustled his snacks annoyingly one more time and jumped onto the empty sofa, making his dislike of watching an anime (that wasn’t an anime apparently?) obvious to the two.

If Tommy so happened to text Tubbo in the middle of season one asking if it was bad to side with a character whose mission was to kill a twelve-year-old child, it wasn’t anyone else’s business. It wasn’t his fault he liked the emo fire guy and Uncle Iroh.

He woke up cold and blinded. His face ached as he lifted himself from the floor. He was in the void again.

His neck twisted as he tried to find the light in the dark. The grey walls in the distance glared down at him, the once green vines bled red. At least he wasn’t in the middle of the maze this time.

Wrapping his arms around himself, Tommy roamed aimlessly, hoping for something to appear. A two-seated table emerged from the darkness and as he got closer, a figure materialised in one of the chairs. The white gleam from a mask gave away who it was. Dream.

There was some type of board game placed on the table and Dream seemed to be playing it by himself. Three coloured dice and ten playing pieces were untouched.

“Why the fuck are you playing some Greek version of Monopoly in my dream visit?” Tommy asked, his teeth chattering as he spoke. He stopped by the side of the table.

“Do not refer to the Knossos Game as Greek Monopoly. If anything, it’s Greek chess.” There was no edge to Dream’s voice, no malice present in the exposed part of his face, which confused Tommy. He was weirdly being civil, something that was rare.

“Again, why are you playing it?”

“I think it would be beneficial for you if you play with me,” Dream said, ignoring his question.

“No thanks, I’m gonna go back into the maze and figure a way out of this place.” Tommy turned to walk back to where he woke up, but a hand grasped onto his left arm, brushing over his tattoo.

“You don’t want to go in without my presence there. You won’t find a way out,” Dream said and loosened his grip when Tommy faced him again.

Huffing, Tommy jerked his arm away. “Alright you egotistical dickhead, I’ll play your Greek Monopoly.”

“It’s not—”

“I don’t care.” Clenching his jaw, Tommy sat down and observed the board game in front of him. The rectangle board was painted gold with blue circles at the bottom side and black circles at the top.

“The aim of the Knossos Game is to get your pieces from the Land of the Living to the Land of the Dead, then back to the Living,” Dream stated, pointing at the different areas on the board as he explained.

“What’s this area?” Tommy asked, referencing the brown area in the middle.

“The River Styx. It’s best if you don’t get caught in there.”

“Sounds boring.”

“I could instead force the void to replay all your past lives’ deaths,” Dream’s voice sharpened, “starting with Sisyphus.”

Tommy's body shuddered, the chair bit at his exposed arms. "Jesus Christ, fine, no insulting your shit board game then I guess."

As Dream continued to explain the rules, Tommy tried to recover from the mere thought of possibly having to see his Sisyphus death again. He couldn't bear to think about it but seeing it... He'd rather play a shit board game than have to watch the last person to ever love him, who tried to change and recover from their destructive behaviour *for* him, die again. And for him to follow shortly after.

The game began and the way Dream played convinced him that this was more than just a board game to Dream. He played as if his life was on the line, with his masked eyes analysing the board at every step his piece moved. He even threw the dice with precision, whereas Tommy just chucked them (which resulted in one of the dice falling onto the floor at some point). Dream didn't respond to any of Tommy's teasing or insults either.

Dream's tactic seemed to be working though, seeing as the masked man was utterly destroying Tommy so far. Dream had secured most of his pieces back from the Land of the Dead whilst Tommy couldn't even get past the River Styx, having to restart every single time.

"This is rigged," Tommy spat, annoyed as another piece died to the river.

"I don't cheat," Dream replied.

"I somehow don't believe you."

Strangely, Tommy found himself enjoying the game for a moment, especially when one of Dream's playing pieces also died to the River Styx. But then within minutes, Dream successfully passed through the river and secured his last piece.

"That was a fun round," Dream said, a smug smile mocking him.

"Fun? You battered me. I didn't even get one piece back to the Living!"

"It's not my fault you always rolled into the River Styx." Dream reached over and reclaimed his playing pieces. "You really are a sore loser."

"Not to be ageist or anything, but you're old as fuck and have played this game for millennia, Dream. You have an advantage," Tommy said, bitter.

"I wasn't even born when this game was made."

"Motherfucker you're a God, you still have an advantage."

Tommy, with his arms folded, watched Dream reset the board.

"I'm glad you aren't resulting to suicide in this life."

Tommy jerked back into his seat, the words slapping him across the face. He didn't expect that. His mood soured. Did Dream not learn how to control his bluntness after being alive for

so long?

“You’re glad?” Dream nodded at him. “I would’ve thought, you being the sick fuck you are, you’d enjoy this shit.”

The smug smile on Dream’s lips moulded into a frown. “I don’t enjoy watching my creation die and come back angrier, and angrier, wishing for a premature death against destiny’s wishes.”

“Then why make me this way?” Tommy asked, his voice rising. He picked up a playing piece from Dream’s side. “Why am I like this?”

Dream stayed silent, his mask focused on the playing piece in Tommy’s hand.

“Oh so you’re quiet now,” Tommy taunted, clenching the piece in his palm. “Come on Dream, you normally like it when I fight back, don’t pussy out now. Answer the question.”

His silence endured.

Tommy slammed his fists onto the table, cracking the board. “I’ve asked for centuries and each time, I get a cop-out answer. First, it was a punishment, you wanting me to suffer, then it was for me to learn a lesson. Which one is it, Dream? What is it now?”

“Contrary to belief, Tommy, I do want you to figure out your myth in this life,” Dream muttered.

Tommy gripped harder on the playing piece.

“Sure, sure you fucking do,” he scoffed. “But if I guessed it correctly, where would your main source of entertainment go? Who else would you torment for eternity? Maybe another child, maybe—”

“You’re arrogant to assume you are the only cursed one.”

Time stopped. The cold air burned his lungs.

“What?” Tommy whispered. All this time he thought he was alone in his struggles, burdened with the fact that no one in the world would ever understand what he experienced and still continued to experience.

Dream held his chained amulet around his neck, an action he did before he would disappear.

“No, no, repeat that you coward. There are people like me out there?”

Dream’s silence returned, mocking the panic in Tommy’s body.

“Who else? Who else did you curse?”

“I’ve said too much.” Doubt settles on Tommy’s shoulders. What if this was another trick?
“You may not believe me, but I’m telling the truth.”

“I don’t believe a single thing you say. Last time I trusted you, I fucking died.” He could still remember the touch of Dream’s arms wrapped around him, his whispers of support against his ears, his comfort that became deadly in a matter of seconds. “And now I continue to die, over and over again, all because of *you*.”

Tommy hurled the playing piece at him, only for it to fly through Dream’s body. He glanced down at the broken board game and picked up the remains, but the pieces evaporated behind his hands.

Dream stared at him, his face paler than before. “Tommy—”

“Fuck off and let me out, Dream. I’ve had enough of this shit.”

Gasping, Tommy woke up with his hands stinging. He cursed under his breath and unclenched his fist, revealing bleeding fingernail indents on his palms. At least it was just his hands this time.

He tried to sit up but something weighted held his body down. He blinked the blurriness out of his vision and recognised that he was still in the living room. Phil and Techno were on their sofa, watching the TV. He must’ve fallen asleep down here. A weighted blanket covered his body.

“You alright?” Phil’s voice was softer than usual. He sat up, his body tingling. “It looked like you were having a nightmare.”

“Yeah, something like that,” Tommy mumbled, tired. “What are you watching now?”

“We stopped watching Avatar when you fell asleep. Now, it’s Bleach.” A blonde man with a green and white striped bucket hat was on the TV screen. Great, another anime.

“And that’s my cue to go to bed. Goodnight.” Tommy shrugged off the weighted blanket, despite the relief it brought him and made his way upstairs.

He swore to God if he saw Dream again in his sleep, he was going to shove those Knossos playing pieces up his fucking arse.

Chapter 6

“For the last time Ranboo, I don’t know the melting point of a child. Stop asking me!” Tommy exclaimed as the two walked from the science block to the bench they usually sat at for lunch. Tubbo was at the bench already, waiting for them.

“It’s a simple question,” Ranboo said, digging himself further into a hole that started the second Ranboo asked if spilling hydrochloric acid on people was as serious as people made it out to seem. Though, Ranboo did turn down Tommy’s offer for him to test it out on him.

“Let’s ask Tubbo.”

Tommy repeated the question and Tubbo put down his sandwich.

“I don’t know about a child but the melting point of human skin is a hundred and sixty-two degrees.”

Both Tommy and Ranboo shared a look before staring back at Tubbo.

“How do you know that?”

Tubbo took a bite of his sandwich, a small grin on his face.

“I’ve never been scared of anyone shorter than me before,” Tommy whispered to Ranboo.

“Everyone is shorter than me.”

“Shut the fuck up. You have stilts in your shoes.”

“That doesn’t make sense—”

“Our science class alliance is over, I hate you again.” Tommy picked up the crushed ball of tinfoil in front of Tubbo and threw it at Ranboo.

“Thank God, it’s back to normal,” Ranboo said, laughing as Tommy flipped him off.

Before Tommy could continue to display his hatred for the tall American, someone texted him.

Anime Man:

Technoblade: Wilbur’s having a bad day; he won’t be able to drop you home after school.

Tommy: [message deleted] is Wilbur ok?

Technoblade: I can pick you up if you want.

Tommy: no, it's fine. I'll walk home.

Technoblade: Alright. Be careful around Wilbur when you get home.

Tommy frowned at the last message. He remembered Tubbo telling him that Wilbur resat year thirteen because of home issues during his GCSEs and first year of sixth form. He thought this house didn't have any prominent red flags but maybe they did. He put his phone back into his blazer pocket.

"What are you two doing after school?" Tommy asked, interrupting their debate over the rankings of the flavours of Starbursts.

"Illegal substances," Tubbo said, unwrapping one of the Starbursts.

"Ignore what he just said," Ranboo added.

"How the fuck could I ignore that?"

Ranboo shrugged. "I'm going to Tubbo's house, with or without his consent, if you want to come as well."

"When are you *not* in my house?" Tubbo said, rolling his eyes at Ranboo's silence. "But yeah, you can come round. We just play video games and random shit."

"We occasionally watch the Office."

"UK or American version?" Tommy asked.

"American."

"You disgust me."

"I'm sorry that I have taste." Ranboo ducked to avoid another ball of tinfoil Tommy threw.

"Take that back."

"Nope."

"Tubbo, help me," Tommy begged. He did not like this pro-American environment he was in.

"No."

"I need new friends." He gawked at how both Ranboo and Tubbo nodded at him. "You're not supposed to agree with me!"

"Start eating your lunch, boss man," Tubbo said. "You guys already came out of class late."

“That wasn’t even my fucking fault—”

“You’ve got him started again,” Ranboo interrupted.

“—Daniel was the one who sprayed acid on my blazer first! I was defending myself and the solution was diluted to shit anyway.”

“Tommy, he had to go to medical.”

“And?”

“I mean, there is the reason why my class aren’t allowed to do practical’s in chemistry,” Tubbo said. “It was bound to happen to your class eventually.”

“Thank you, Tubbo!”

“And Daniel is a dickhead.”

Ranboo sighed at the two. “I can’t believe you’re defending this.”

“Shut up, boob boy.”

“That is not my name!”

Ignoring how Tommy tried to push Ranboo into the road several times, the walk to Tubbo’s house went fine. Though, Tubbo’s house was not what Tommy expected. Maybe that was due to the duck that tried to bite him as soon as he stepped into the living room.

“Why the fuck do you have a duck in your house?” Tommy asked, pointing at the duck who was currently attempting to jump up the kitchen counter. Seeing an alive duck in a kitchen was just something that shouldn’t exist. That was a level of morbidity he didn’t want to associate with.

“Benson,” Tubbo said, not giving him any more information.

“Benson?”

“Yep, Benson,” Ranboo nodded. “Keep your ankles away from him.”

Perhaps he made a mistake going round Tubbo’s house. He took off his shoes and left them beside Ranboo’s and followed the two.

Besides the duck, the house looked normal. Well, the ‘Live, Love, Laugh’ sign was a big no, especially as it was next to one of those quirky mother images that boasted about their

dependence on wine to deal with their children. Tommy was thankful that a Minecraft house was the only framed image in the Craft house.

Whilst Tubbo retrieved drinks from the fridge, Niki came running down the stairs, dressed in the same outfit he saw her wearing in the café.

“Oh, hi Tommy,” she said as she grabbed her keys out of Benson’s mouth. That was something he just chose to gloss over.

Tommy smiled and waved at her, before following Tubbo out of the room and up the stairs.

“How do you know my sister?” Tubbo asked with narrowed eyes.

“I know every single woman.” Tommy grinned at the exasperation he heard from Ranboo.

“Oh wait is it a,” Tubbo pointed to the inside of his arm, “thing?”

Tommy looked down at his arm, confused. “What?”

“Did you not like Germany either?”

“Tubbo, I can still hear you!” Niki shouted from the kitchen.

“Your secret’s safe with me,” Tubbo whispered this time and ran up the rest of the stairs, which only added to Tommy’s confusion.

“What the fuck is he going on about?” Tommy asked Ranboo, who shrugged at him.

“You’re asking the guy with memory problems.”

“I could push you down these stairs and make it worse. Or even fix it for you.”

“Please don’t.” Tommy laughed and headed into the room Tubbo rushed into.

Tubbo’s room looked exactly like Tommy predicted. It was painted differently from the rest of the house, with mint green walls that blended into the pale blue ceiling, which was decorated with star constellations and planets. Knowing Tubbo, it was probably accurate (seeing as though the painting resembling Pluto had a sad face on it because it wasn’t an actual planet). There were shelves of collectables, ranging from snow globes, bee items from year eight to printed pictures of CS:GO gun skins.

As Tubbo turned on his PC, Ranboo waltzed into the room and jumped onto the double bed. And then took his face mask off.

Tommy covered his eyes. “Woah, woah, let’s not undress ourselves here.”

“Tommy, I’m just taking my mask off.” He dropped his hands that covered his eyes and scowled at Ranboo. The mask-less man just looked like a standard, white Sims 4 character with sunglasses on.

“Exactly! Have some decency, Jesus Christ.”

“You’re gonna lose your shit when you see his eyes,” Tubbo stated, not bothered by a maskless Ranboo.

“I’ll leave that for another day, we don’t want Tommy to explode on us,” Ranboo said.

“Or do we?”

“Don’t talk about wanting to watch me explode when I’m right fucking here!” Tommy exclaimed, disturbed by this entire conversation.

“Would you rather me do it behind your back?” Tubbo asked.

“No! Don’t do it at all, what the fuck man!”

Tubbo smothered his laugh.

“What happened to my wholesome bee boy?”

“I will skin you alive,” Tubbo said, still laughing but with murder in his eyes.

“Just be glad no one in this household trusts him enough to let him have knives,” Ranboo inputted.

Tommy stood up from the edge of the bed. “I want to go home.”

“Too late! It’s Mario Kart time.”

And with that, the threats were forgotten, replaced with a new fight over the settings of the game. Tommy refused to play with a person that chose ‘Toad’ as their character. The three cycled their way through every single multi-player game Tubbo had (which included Just Dance, something Tommy hated since Ranboo destroyed them at it) and then proceeded to raid Tubbo’s fridge when it got late.

Tommy didn’t know how much time had passed since he got there but that didn’t matter to him. He found himself having fun with his friend (plus Ranboo) and that was what mattered.

Tommy entered his house and frowned. Normally, Techno and Phil were downstairs or Phil’s office door was open. He unlocked his phone and looked at the time, ignoring the notifications that flashed up since he finally had an internet connection.

The glaring digits of ‘23:01’ haunted him. Oh fuck. He broke one of the few, reasonable rules of this household, which was to not be out after the nine o’clock curfew. Well, that explained

the amount of text and call notifications.

Shouting came from the garden, the glass doors wide open. The draft from the living room added to the anxiety riddling in his skin. He walked towards the noise, bracing himself as the conversation became clearer. Phil was in the garden, but the person he was talking to blended into the darkness of the garden.

“I don’t know what to fucking do, Dad! Is that what you wanted to hear?” Tommy recognised the tone of the voice before the person.

It was the tone of Sisyphus, something Tommy familiarised himself with. Someone who repeatedly tried to keep going, to heave against the endless pressure, the denial of fulfilment and smile in the face of death. But, as always, the temptation of giving up won, evident in the strains of Wilbur’s voice and harsh words.

“Look, Will, I don’t understand why you’re acting like this but—”

“Yes, you do! You may be ignoring what happened but I can’t forget it!” Tommy flinched, not used to such anger coming from Wilbur.

“I’m not ignoring that, and don’t you *ever* suggest that I am.” Phil stepped closer to Wilbur, his shoulders hunched. “Did you take your meds today?”

“Yes I fucking took them, but...” a loud bang against wood accompanied by Wilbur’s crying out, made Tommy wince. The light of the shed turned on. Wilbur was a mess, clutching his hands, red in the face. “They’re not working and I’ve been telling you this for months.”

“Have you booked an appointment—”

“No, no I can’t. They’ll put me on it again and I’d rather feel this than nothing at all.”

“What if you try therapy again?”

“No, just- I can’t do this. Dad, I can’t do this,” whimpers left Wilbur’s mouth, mixed with wet sobs.

“Wilbur, if this is about her, then you have to.”

A tense silence followed. Tommy gulped, stepping back into the living room, his eyes not leaving Phil’s back.

“Shut up! Just shut up!” Wilbur cried out, hitting his fists onto the shed again, harder each step Phil tried to make towards him. “Please... please leave me alone.”

As the shed slammed shut, the commotion hoarding in Tommy pulled at his chest. He couldn’t breathe, he couldn’t move.

Loud noises didn’t usually bother him, yet many centuries ago it did. If anyone raised their voice no matter their intention, Tommy would retort into a quivering mess, hearing nothing

but the sounds of rigged explosions and bloodcurdling screams of those his big brother falsely swore to protect and fight for.

He thought he got over that, left that in the past. Yet here he was. Frozen in time. Conscious of the blood travelling down into his muscles under his skin and his hoodie gripping onto the sweat of his back.

As a figure walked towards him, the pounding in his heart soured. He could barely hear himself think.

Words left Phil's mouth but Tommy couldn't keep up. More shouting rang past his ears.

"Phil I—"

"No, Tommy, you need to listen," his voice rose and so did the aching in Tommy's head, "do you even know what time it is?"

"P-Phil I'm sor—"

"My rules in his house are for your safety. I've had enough shit from Wilbur today," Phil moves closer. "I didn't know where you were, who you were with, if you were safe or in danger. It's pitch black outside Tommy and you're fifteen years old!"

His eyes focused on the hands clenched tightly by Phil's side. He could almost imagine a sword clasped between them, bathed in his brother's blood.

"I'm really—" his voice broke off. His vision blurred. Bomb residue and gunpowder stung at his nose, the ground beneath him trembled with his legs.

In his chaos, someone touched his shoulders, the hands too warm to be Phil's. The world moved around him, his breath shortening with every step he didn't remember taking.

The next thing he knew he was sitting down with something draped around his waist. A deep voice counting down his breaths grounded him. A pink-haired man handed him a mug, the cold substance inside pinched at his hands.

He blinked harshly, wetting his face, and squeezed at the cup to test his strength. Techno knelt down in front of him but the scent of gunpowder still hadn't left his nose.

He was somewhere he hadn't been before, probably Techno's room. Mounted onto the walls were bookcases with the contents ordered by the author's surname. There were three fencing weapons attached to the wall as well, with Tommy only recognising the sabre; medals hung next to each different weapon. An Art of War poster was placed above the double bed.

Techno cleared his throat, Tommy's eyes snapped back to him.

"I'm not so good at this whole emotional support thing," Techno said, keeping his voice quiet, "so uh, you good or...?"

Tommy glanced down at the mug in his hands and gripped at the weighted blanket around his waist. He felt safe.

“I’m good.” Techno gave him a look. “I’m fine, it just scared me.”

“Wilbur gets like this sometimes and it affects Phil as well.” Techno got up from where he knelt. “I told Phil that you texted me where you were going before and that you were going to be late, so it was my fault for not relaying the information to him.”

Tommy gaped at him. “You didn’t have to do that.”

“I think having to deal with the consequences of breaking house rules would be a bit unfair after whatever Phil just put you through now,” Techno said. “He’ll probably speak to you later or in the morning about what just happened.”

Tommy didn’t do well with apologies, especially worded ones. He didn’t have a good relationship with them in any life, especially in the lives where it was deserved the most. He’d rather not sit through a half-arsed apology.

“That good with you?” it was the same monotone voice Tommy was used to but this time laced in concern.

Tommy nodded at him. He didn’t know why Techno was even doing any of this, he rarely spoke to him unless Tommy started the conversation. He didn’t know whether Techno was still awkward around him because of the situation that happened ages ago with Tommy’s scars or if this was normally how Techno acted.

Tommy sipped at his drink, recoiling at the cold on his dry lips.

“You wanna watch me play Bedwars?” Techno asked out of nowhere.

“Sure.”

Techno let Tommy keep the weighted blanket, which was currently wrapped around him and his cow plushie. His notebook stayed underneath his pillow; he didn’t want to see his brother’s handwriting after that. It would be breaking his years-long streak but it was too much.

He stared at his ceiling, hoping that sleep would catch up to him, that the fatigue his body felt would be reciprocated to his head.

The knocking on his door disturbed his thoughts. He called for them to come in; there was no point delaying this shit.

Light from the corridor brightened his room and Phil stepped inside.

“I wanted to check if you were alright, after earlier,” his voice was soft and drenched in guilt, but Tommy didn’t care.

“Well, you’ve checked. You can go now.” He was tired and also tired of this shit. He just wanted to go to sleep and forget this ever happened, regardless of the speech Phil was about to give him.

“Look, Tommy—”

“Yeah I get it, you’re sorry or whatever, and you promise to do better, but you’ll probably do it again in a week. It’s fine. I’m over it.” He was in fact, *not* over it, but the words just kept pouring out.

“Tommy.” He sighed and sat up, his hand under the cover gripping at Henry. “I fucked up, okay? I should’ve let you explain yourself instead of me just yelling at you. Look, mate, you were frozen by the time Techno came downstairs. I did that to you, me shouting did that, and it obviously affected you.”

He stayed silent. Phil walked closer, leaning down on the floor beside him.

“I want to make this home safe and comfortable for you and the way I reacted violated all of that and believe me when I mean that I won’t do that again.” Tommy tried to ignore the part of him that melted under the caring expression on Phil’s face.

“I’ve heard that line before,” Tommy muttered. “And it didn’t end well for me.”

“Then let me prove it to you, okay? Let me show you that I want what’s best for you in this house.”

Tommy bit on his cheek, not used to such sincerity.

“Fine. But if you do this shit again I have permission to beat the shit out of you before Linda Smith picks me up. No charges pressed.”

Phil rested his hand on the edge of Tommy’s bed. “Agreed. No charges pressed.”

Tommy grabbed Phil’s hand, not letting go of it. Phil squeezed it lightly.

“Is there anything you want to tell me before I let you sleep?”

“Is Wilbur okay?” Tommy asked.

Phil sighed. “He’s asleep now, he’ll probably be alright in the morning.”

Tommy nodded. Phil let go of his hand and said goodbye, leaving him in the darkness.

His hand tingled, reminding him of the soothing touch of his first father’s hands. The same comforting hands that tucked Tommy into bed at night and drove a sword through his

brother's chest right in front him, in front of everyone, only a couple of years later.

His father never apologised, but Phil just did for something so minor compared to *that*.

This confirmed it for Tommy; Phil wasn't his first father. He knew this prior but it meant *something* now and the smile that Tommy poorly concealed as he brought Henry closer to his chest was evidence of that.

Chapter 7

For the number of times random people had slammed into the back of his shoes with their trolleys in Tesco's, Tommy may leave this shopping centre with no shoes at all. He had to quickly leave the dairy aisle after he shoved his trolley into the back of someone who ran over his ankle. Sure, the man had back problems but the fucker deserved it. Tommy had a problem with him and dealt with it accordingly.

Phil observed the entire thing with a look that Tommy could only describe as 'please for the love of God stop terrorising people' mixed with a hint of 'you should have hit them back harder'.

Disregarding all of that, he liked their shopping trip. Every time he passed something he wanted and Phil said he couldn't buy it, Tommy brought up how upset Phil made him last week by shouting at him. It was guilt-tripping and borderline manipulative, but he had good intentions. The bottles of Coke and many types of biscuits were worth it.

"Can you get the last items for me?" Phil asked, passing him the shopping list. "I need to get something from the pharmacy section."

"Sure." Tommy read the list—well, he tried to, Phil's handwriting was atrocious—and decided to do his own shopping instead. He didn't feel like visiting the toiletry aisle.

Year 13 Resit:

Tommy: I'm at Tesco's, do you want anything?

Wilbur: if you get me a white monster and a chocolate freddo I will cherish you forever

Tommy: ew

Wilbur: silence, gremlin

Tommy: ok, no gifts then.

Wilbur: no no no please. I apologise, gimme stuff

dont leave me on read u bitch

He grinned at his phone. Wilbur had been ignoring everyone for the past couple of days, though he still sent random Reddit links to the family group chat at various hours late in the night or early morning. Tommy hoped a White Monster and some chocolate would prompt a conversation with the man—and that was *not* because he cared about Wilbur. No, he was just

curious about why he was acting this way. Okay, maybe he cared a *little* bit but only that much.

His phone vibrated in his hand.

Anime Man:

Technoblade: Get me strawberry laces.

Tommy didn't even want to know how Techno knew he was getting people snacks. But he kind of owed him, so a pack of strawberry laces on top of what Wilbur wanted wouldn't hurt Phil's budget. After he got what the two requested and the rest of the shopping, Phil joined him again (he ignored how the man groaned at the amount of new items that was not in the trolley when Phil left).

In the car ride back to the house, Tommy noticed the date on his phone. "Is the reason we did food shopping because Linda is coming round and you don't want it to look like you're starving me?"

Phil glanced at him during the red light. "Tommy, what the fuck?"

"That isn't a no."

"But it isn't a yes!"

"You just said yes."

"I can't deal with you." Tommy laughed at Phil's pain. "Put on music or something."

Dedicated to annoy Phil further, he plugged in the aux and proceeded to play his favourite bardcore Medieval cover.

"I expected modern music from a teenager, not the Black Death."

Tommy turned it up louder.

Phil knocked his hand away from the dial. "If you turn it up any more, you're going flying through this window."

"Do it. No more government money and no more perfect condition car for you."

"You little shit."

Even though Tommy enjoyed himself, he didn't enjoy having to unpack the shopping when they got back to the house. Phil said it was his punishment for abusing the guilt he still felt over making Tommy cry the other day, which was fair.

He put the snacks Techno and Wilbur wanted aside as he unpacked it all, but the small box at the bottom of the last shopping bag confused him. It was a medication box addressed for Wilbur Craft. Amitriptyline, a tricyclic antidepressant. Ignoring the part of him that was too curious for his own good, he put it in the basket of medical supplies. He owed Wilbur his privacy.

Speaking of Wilbur, Tommy grabbed his snacks and the biscuits he acquired from Phil and ran upstairs. He entered Wilbur's bedroom, which was already ajar.

"I have come here to drink and eat these in front of you because you were rude to me over texts," Tommy said, holding up the bundle of snacks in his arms.

Wilbur, who was laid down in his bed with the covers wrapped around him, sat up with haste. He looked worse than Tommy imagined, with bruises under his eyes from lack of sleep and his face was paler than normal.

"You little bitch."

"The more insults you give me, the more I bother you." Tommy dropped the snacks on the bed and snatched the chocolate Freddo before Wilbur could get it off him.

He unwrapped it and aimed the chocolate towards his mouth.

"Fine! Fine, I'm sorry for calling you a gremlin." Satisfied, Tommy threw the Freddo at him and placed the White Monster drink on the bedside table. "Thank you, child."

"I hate you," Tommy grumbled as he wheeled the desk chair closer and ate the biscuits.

"How did you get Dad to buy all of them?" Wilbur asked, sipping on his drink.

"Blackmail and guilt-tripping."

"Nice work." Wilbur high-fived him. "What did you guilt-trip?"

Tommy paused, not knowing how to word it. How would you tell someone that they had indirectly caused whatever the fuck Tommy experienced?

"Y'know the other day, when you and Phil were arguing late at night?" Wilbur frowned but nodded at him. "Phil kinda yelled at me after because I was home late and uh, I freaked out."

"Oh." Wilbur put his drink down. "I didn't know you were downstairs. Sorry you had to hear that."

"Are you okay now?" Tommy asked, wanting an actual answer this time.

"I'm getting better."

"Is that why you didn't go to school today?"

"Kinda. School is part of the reason why I'm feeling like this. Music class, to be specific."

His explanation only made Tommy more curious.

“Anyway, enough about me. How did your day go then?” Wilbur sat up further and leant on his arms, staring up at Tommy as if it was story-time in fucking preschool.

“It was good. I didn’t have history or P.E so I remain at peace with life.”

“Why don’t you like history?”

Tommy bit on his cheek. He wanted to give him an actual reason, something as truthful as it could get.

“The whole L’Manberg thing and how it’s covered rubs me the wrong way. It’s just so... stupid. The essay titles we’re given are so dumb. Like, since when were the over-taxation policies of King George *not* an important reason for the cause of the L’Manberg Revolution? It was the main reason why people were sick of monarchy and wanted independence. The argument that greed and power were motivating factors is bullshit.”

There were many more examples of why he hated history, like how it was inaccurate and biased as fuck, and got his name and age wrong. In some passages, it referred to Tommy as young and his actual age, which was around twelve when the wars started, but then in others, it says he was an adult during the wars. Maybe historians didn’t like the fact that they placed blame on a child and tried to justify themselves with twisting information.

“I enjoyed that class, but yeah it was weird. W. Soot especially,” Wilbur said, causing Tommy to freeze at the mention of his brother. “It’s sad honestly how he manipulated his people into following him—”

“He was doing what he had to do,” Tommy said, defensive.

“So indoctrinating his younger brother, trying to create a dictatorship, and blowing up the nation when he’s rightfully kicked out for violating democracy, killing himself and injuring the people he swore to protect are things he *had* to do?”

He flinched back into his seat, his head bleary from the reminders.

“What do you mean he indoctrinated his brother?”

“Oh come on, don’t tell me you defend the guy. He was a dickhead,” Wilbur rebuked.

“Tommy, he literally pushed his brother into becoming a child soldier and conditioned him into thinking violence and war were the only ways forward. Not only that but when he was banished, holy shit the stuff he wrote. The guy was fucking insane—”

“I don’t want to know anymore,” Tommy snapped, his hands digging into his chair. He wasn’t aware his brother wrote during their time banished; he hardly saw him at all, and the times he *was* around him were times he’d rather forget. Even war could break the kindest men.

“You alright?”

“It’s just, W. Soot reminds me of a foster brother I used to have,” he lied, not knowing how else to express his discomfort over the conversation.

“Fair enough, sorry you had to be around someone like that.” The sincerity in Wilbur’s voice irked him.

He didn’t want to unpack that yet, or even think of the wrongdoings of his brother. He’d rather stay in denial for a bit longer, with the only surfacing memories being the times his brother taught him how to shoot a bow and ruffled his hair at his first bullseye, showering him in praise and affection. Tommy preferred simpler times before the burden of war changed everything.

“Uh anyway. Keep the pack of Oreos. I’m gonna get changed out of my school uniform.”

Tommy left the room, still bothered by what just happened.

“Thank you, by the way,” Wilbur called out. He stopped for a moment and sighed, stretching his shoulders to try to get rid of his unease. “You’re still a gremlin though!”

He stifled a snort and entered his room.

When Tommy walked downstairs, he didn’t expect to see everyone there. Techno, who was eating his strawberry laces, nodded at him and Wilbur was sat next to him on the sofa. He heard Phil in the kitchen.

Tommy collapsed onto the same sofa as the others.

“Can we pretend we neglect Tommy and show we’re not a fit household for fostering?” Wilbur said casually.

Tommy pushed at Wilbur’s shoulders. “What the fuck, why?”

“I don’t want to see Linda Smith.”

“So you’d sacrifice our friendship over not seeing that prick?” Tommy exclaimed, exaggerating the pout on his lips.

“I would sacrifice anything.”

“Even your Spotify clout?” Techno asked, his mouth full of strawberry laces.

“Let’s not get too ahead of ourselves here.”

“Dickhead,” Tommy scoffed. Of course Spotify playlists would rank higher than people on Wilbur’s fucked hierarchy. “I hope Linda takes her time observing the fuck out of you guys and her notetaking makes you nervous.”

Techno turned to look at him. “What kind of threat is that?”

“Trust me, she’s so fucking obvious when she’s talking shit about you in her notepad.” It didn’t help that the notepad was hot pink and the pen she used to write made a scratching sound he hated.

Phil came back from the kitchen. “Ms Smith is going to be here in a minute and I swear to God if any of you make any jokes about belts—”

“Beltza,” Wilbur said, ducking to avoid a slap round the head from Phil.

“Y’know, the more you joke about it, the higher the chance it may become a thing,” Techno added.

“Craft a belt then.”

“One day I will,” Phil said, glaring at his son whilst Tommy just sat there confused as ever. To be honest, he didn’t want to know the context of ‘Beltza’ either.

Someone knocked on the door and Phil moved to open it. As Linda Smith—in all her shit glory—entered, the joking spirit emptied the room.

Her hair looked blonder than it was before (Tommy guessed that Linda not having to deal with him meant fewer grey hairs for her). She wore the same granny flower dress she always had on to social worker visits. Tommy swore she had duplicates of the same fucking outfit. The dreaded notepad was already in her hands; the woman was ready to fuck up Tommy’s happiness in his house. If she hadn’t noticed the obvious signs of child exploitation in his last foster home, then he assumed she’d fuck up this one where he finally felt welcome.

Tommy stayed silent as the Craft’s greeted her. She took a seat on the empty sofa and Phil went to fetch her a drink. Tommy shuffled closer to Wilbur and Techno, not liking the look he received from Linda. You would have thought a social worker knew how to conceal their hatred for a person, especially if said person was right in front of them. But nope.

“I assume Tommy remembers how my visits go, so after this, I’ll take him somewhere private, it’s protocol.”

It started awkwardly like it usually did. Linda didn’t help by scribbling down things every time he opened his mouth to reply to her boring questions—he didn’t want to give her a detailed answer about his daily routine or how he spent his leisure time. He understood it was necessary, but still. Whenever Phil or someone other than Tommy spoke, her facial expression changed, almost as if she were trusted their word over his. It went fine though. Well, that was before she asked if she could see his bedroom.

“How come this room doesn’t look lived in?” Linda asked, staring at the blank walls and the unpacked bag Tommy had beside his bed.

It wasn’t the Craft’s fault that he never liked unpacking *that* bag, which kept all the things he was attached to during this life (this was something he couldn’t grow out of). Or that he didn’t like decorating his room.

His heart dropped as Linda shook her head whilst she wrote something in her notepad.

“Phil’s taking me to IKEA next week though,” Tommy blurted out, the lie coming out of nowhere. “I’m the one who didn’t want to decorate. Or did you forget that, Linda? I would’ve thought that you’d remember what happened in the last house.”

Linda clenched her jaw and crossed out some of the words she had written.

“It’s still a concern I need to report.” Tommy didn’t know how one woman could sound so condescending in just one sentence.

“At least I have my own clothes this time.” He opened the closet door. “Or did you forget about that too, dickhead?”

“Tommy.” Phil scolded, his voice harsh. Wilbur struggled to cover up his amusement.

“Fine. Sorry.” Tommy didn’t want to apologise but if he defied Phil on in front of Linda, then she’d make another note of *concern* about the parenting style and behavioural management in this household.

Linda’s eyebrows—or, what was left of them—rose in surprise and she closed her notepad.

“I think it’s time for that private conversation,” she said, fiddling with her pen tauntingly. “Is there anywhere for us to go?”

“There’s a café near the park, it’s quiet around this time on Thursday’s,” Wilbur offered.

“Good suggestion.”

The walk to the café was painful, especially as they passed Tobias Underscore’s statue and Linda decided to comment on how weird it was that the statue was dented. When they reached the café, Tommy went to his normal table by the back, not giving Linda any choice in the matter. His mood instantly brightened as Niki came over with a smile on her face. Thank God.

Linda, being the normal bitch she was, ordered a black coffee whilst Tommy just wanted some water. The comfort he felt left as soon as Niki did.

“Do you like it here?” That wasn’t the first question he was expecting.

“Yeah, yeah I do,” Tommy answered, not hesitating. Despite how the town’s history constantly mocked him and so did the way it was taught, the people here made up for it.

“What about your foster brothers? Do you get on with them?” Linda asked, notepad already in hand.

Tommy nodded and she waved at him to elaborate. “Wilbur is more talkative, which is both good and bad because he never shuts up sometimes, but he’s nice, annoying though. Technoblade works differently, he’s more silent. He got me a book after we had a slight argument in the beginning, I haven’t gotten to reading it yet though. But he’s cool.”

“And your foster father?”

“Phil’s cool as well, he created Minecraft and has my utmost respect. He’s a good person.” Tommy didn’t know where the sudden honesty came from, maybe it was the familiarity of the café or the topic.

“So you haven’t been a problem for them?” Tommy’s mood dropped. All hopes that this would go well, that she was *listening* to him this time drove straight out the window.

“I haven’t,” he said, trying to keep the edge out of his voice.

“Really?” Linda tilted her head mockingly. “No school fights? No police calls needed? You haven’t lashed out at anyone?”

“No.” Tommy gritted his teeth, eyes narrowing at her.

“So if I call up the school right now, they wouldn’t say anything different?”

“Why don’t you *ever* believe a word I say?” he sneered, voice raising. “Even if it’s positive, you don’t fucking believe me.”

“Tommy—”

“What’s the point of these fucking visits or even having a social worker if anything I say doesn’t matter?”

Niki came over with the drinks, but Tommy didn’t care. He kept his hands under the desk, scared of what he’d do if they were close to Linda.

“Look, we know your history, so we need to take that into account,” she spoke as if she was oblivious to the damage her words did to him.

“You are such a—”

The cup of water Niki placed knocked over the table, leaking onto Linda’s lap.

“Oh, I am so sorry!” Niki said, wiping at the water with napkins, which caused more water to spill towards Linda.

Tommy’s anger diminished as Linda proceeded to make a joke out of herself and behaved as pathetic as always, complaining at Niki and her waitressing abilities.

“I’m really sorry Miss, there are bathrooms around the corner,” Niki said, pointing towards it.

Linda got up and rushed around the corner.

“Are you okay? She looked like she was bothering you,” Niki asked. Tommy grinned as he realised Niki did that on purpose.

“Well, when you’re labelled as a pathological liar and problem child, social worker visits aren’t very fun,” Tommy admitted, helping her wipe up the water still on the table.

“I’d just run away if she was my social worker.”

“You think I haven’t tried? Kinoko Foster Care are the most incompetent bastards I’ve ever met.”

It took them ages to figure out that one of their rules as a foster agency was violated. Recording and uploading any information of kids you foster wasn’t allowed yet a whole fucking YouTube family vlogging channel somehow went under their noses.

“If it gets any worse, give me a signal and I’ll overcook something to make the fire alarm set off,” Niki said as she picked up the damp napkins.

Tommy smiled at her. “Thank you.”

“Thank Techno as well, he’s the one who texted me asking if I could interfere.”

Linda came back, the wet patch visible on the front of her dress.

“I’m sorry again Miss for the disturbance.” Tommy could tell the guilt in Niki’s voice and face were fake.

“Just be glad it was the water that split and not the tea. For your sake.”

Niki walked away and Tommy rested his hands on the table. “Is there anything else we need to talk about or are you going to find more ways to call me a liar without saying those words?”

“No. I think we’re done with the questions,” Linda sighed, glaring at him. “The next visit will be unannounced.”

“It would be better if you just didn’t come at all, but I guess that’s fine.” A smug smile settled on his lips as Linda sipped on her tea, annoyed at this entire visit. At least the feeling was mutual.

A relieved breath left Tommy as he slumped onto the sofa. Linda had left and he appreciated every single minute that had passed ever since. He didn't know where everyone else in the house was but he wanted to be alone anyway. He looked at the decorations in the living room and frowned. Tommy knew that he had to do something with his bedroom before the next visit, yet he didn't know what. He didn't have a favourite colour anymore, his old favourites were ruined by the flag of a failed nation. Maybe he could put up some lights, like the LED ones the girl he sat next to in English showed him (she wanted his opinion for her room—she went with the butterfly ones in the end).

The glass door to the garden opened and his body froze at the smell that overwhelmed the room. It was a familiar scent that Tommy would rather forget.

Wilbur walked through the door, vape in hand. “Oh, you're back. How did it go?”

Tommy breathed through his mouth, trying to blink away the memories that desperately wanted to be heard. Sisyphus clawed at his head.

“It went fine.”

Wilbur stepped closer and Tommy jumped up from his seat, backing away from him. He rubbed at his nose and tried to ignore the reminder of *her*.

“Can you tell Phil I'm going out? I need some fresh air.” Tommy left before Wilbur could answer, grabbing his bag and coat as he rushed towards the front door.

He didn't know where he was going but he didn't stop running. He needed his body exhausted so no thoughts of Sisyphus and his mother in that life could slip by. His bag whacked across his shoulders with every step until he slowed down. It was dark outside, the December sky empty.

He stopped by a bench beside the seawall. The sea calmed his heartbeat. He sat down and looked up at the sky, only to see one star constellation directly above him; he joined the lines between the stars which formed a half-circle, or some kind of ‘U’ shape.

Tommy reached for his notebook from his bag and opened it to the most recent page. Various drawn tables stared back at him, the boxes either ticked or crossed out. His pen hovered over the myth table named ‘Daedalus’. He drew a question mark on its corresponding box.

He didn't like the idea that his myth could be Daedalus since it would closely associate him with his past myths of Icarus and Theseus—with Daedalus being Icarus' father and the creator of Minos' Labyrinth. Tommy knew he still struggled with the whole moral of hubris, something his Icarus life never let him forget, so this myth was a possibility. But if he was Daedalus, that would mean there'd be an event similar to him harming someone better than him, perhaps even killing like in the original myth. He didn't like that part.

Sighing, Tommy drew a new table and unlocked his phone, opening up Google. He searched for Greek myths involving found family but rolled his eyes at the shit cites. He wasn't looking for how ‘Even the Greeks had Daddy Issues – Google Arts & Culture’. He was looking for answers that could prevent him from dying in less than five months.

He rewrote his question and searched Greek myth tragedies involving family, and immediately deleted his search history and turned off his phone as Oedipus's Wiki page appeared.

Nope, he did not want his myth to be about the motherfucking Oedipus. Killing his father and marrying his mother was not something on his agenda. No thanks. He'd rather just sit out on living if he ended up being *that*.

He closed his notebook and laid down on the bench. He stared up at the star constellation before closing his eyes, focused on the waves peacefully crashing against the seawall and enjoying the cool breeze of the night.

Chapter 8

Tommy did not like having to sit on the floor behind the music block but because he didn't feel like changing out of his P.E kit for breaktime, he needed to. What kind of sick fuck made him have double physical education with break slotted in between, meaning that he had to get changed just to eat a sandwich for fifteen minutes and get changed again?

It was the last day of school before Christmas break and Tubbo and Ranboo sat beside him, deep in a conversation about their plans for Christmas that Tommy didn't know if he was a part of. He had only been friends with them for about two months.

"Should we do a Secret Santa this year?"

That was something Tommy hated about Christmas, the part where you were borderline obligated to get people gifts. He used to love the holiday, especially when his brother would go out of his way to make it special, but then war did what it usually did to things Tommy loved and rotted it to its core.

"A Secret Santa with three people?" Ranboo's words caught Tommy's attention. Three people, him included. Warmth travelled to his cheeks.

"Yeah, but we just gotta make sure that each person gets a different name," Tubbo explained.

"How?"

"We could download an app or something—"

"Or we could get someone to arrange who gets the gifts," Tommy said, shuffling closer to them.

"No offence but we're not exactly popular people in this school."

Tommy narrowed his eyes at him. "Speak for yourself. I could get Clementine to do it."

"Who's that?"

"She's the girl I sit next to in English. She teaches me new terminology she picks up from TikTok and Twitter each lesson. Miss King hates it when she includes it in her essay drafts, so I asked Clem if I could do the same."

"Please don't tell me she's the one responsible for you learning the term 'mansplain'," Ranboo groaned as Tommy nodded at him with a proud smile on his face. It was the word that Tommy kept whispering to him during science in first period every time the boy answered a question.

"Fine. Clementine decides the Secret Santa. You better not rig it so we all have to give you presents though," Tubbo said, pointing his finger accusingly at Tommy.

He put his hands up in a mocking surrender. “Hold up, I didn’t even think of that.”

“Nice Tubbo, now you’ve given him ideas,” Ranboo said.

“Now lads, you know me, I would *never* do that.”

“You literally would.”

The school bell saved Tommy from having to defend himself over something he probably would do, but for the sake of friendship, he won’t rig the Secret Santa. It was probably the last Christmas he’d experience in this life if he didn’t find a myth that made sense.

Tommy visited the bench again last night, the island sea helping him focus on researching the fuck out of Greek myths. He refused to be Jason though; out of all the cool Greek names and the hero who captured the Golden Fleece was called Jason. That was just embarrassing. His myth was filled with betrayal and murder, something else he’d like to avoid being associated with. Though, the shit name disturbed Tommy more.

P.E and English class passed quickly, and he hated how he was in a good mood before history. Clementine had given him Tubbo’s name for the Secret Santa instead of Ranboo’s, which he was thankful for (you’d never catch him buying anything for an American).

He swore Miss Allingham’s history classroom just reeked of ‘I’m here to represent any flaw of the modern education system’. It also didn’t help that this would be his last lesson before Christmas break since school ended early. The tables were arranged differently than usual, placed as lined desks instead of joined tables. Despite that, he sat in between Tubbo and Ranboo and laid his head on the desk.

“I still don’t get why you hate this class,” Tubbo said as Tommy continued to bash his head on the surface.

“Tubbo, I don’t think you realise the historical inaccuracies in this fucking textbook.” He grabbed his book and shoved the amount of red pen he wrote in Tubbo’s face. “Look! It’s so fucking dumb.”

Tubbo scoffed, “You’re like my sister. She hated this class too because of all the mistakes the textbook had.”

“Good. She would appreciate my slander.”

The lesson carried on how it normally did, with Tommy doing the bare minimum and correcting a different section of the textbook, not listening to a word Miss Allingham said.

Well, that was until she decided to call on him.

“Tommy, care to answer the question or should I repeat it since drawing in the textbook is more interesting to you than the history of our town?”

He flushed red as the classroom’s attention diverted onto him. Miss Allingham crossed her arms.

“I wasn’t colouring in the textbook,” Tommy defended, putting down his pen.

“First warning, Tommy. Now, answer my question,” she said. “Can you give me the number of casualties in the First L’Manberg War and how this affected the economy of both the Essempi Kingdom and the L’Manberg nation?”

Tommy froze at the mention of *that* war. His left fist clenched under the table.

“Second warning—”

“Nineteen died and twelve were heavily injured on the L’Manberg side,” Tommy spat, his hands shaking. “The economy of the Essempi Kingdom remained unaffected since their casualties were soldiers on the front-line whilst L’Manberg suffered as able-bodied workers were hurt during the war.”

His palms stung from the sharpness of his nails.

“I asked for the textbook amount, not the one from the history archives, but thank you for the unasked specifics,” she said, her tone designed to humiliate him further.

He knew the exact amount because he was the one to bury the bodies, the mutilated faces of the dead, the aftermath of the bloodshed. He made sure every single one of them had a funeral and their sacrifice was noted. The torture of burying someone younger than him—someone who shouldn’t have even been trapped in the situation of war—couldn’t be forgotten.

A gloved hand grabbed onto his from under the desk. Ranboo loosened his clenched fist and held it so Tommy couldn’t wound his palm further.

“Now because you’re trying to be smart, can you give me the number of people who died in the Final L’Manberg War?” Miss Allingham continued.

Tommy squeezed onto Ranboo’s hand. He didn’t know. He avoided reading sections of the textbook that occurred after his death for a reason. He didn’t want to know how many of his people died because he wasn’t *there* to help. There was a certain pain in reliving memories his history class provoked. But hearing events he could have prevented if he didn’t fucking burn down one of King George’s properties and get himself exiled was worse.

“Over three hundred,” Ranboo whispered under his breath.

Tommy repeated it, his mouth dry.

“Thank you, Ranboo, for that answer,” she jeered. “Any significant individuals that died in this war whilst you’re answering other people’s questions?”

“Nick Chu,” Ranboo said. Tommy didn’t recognise the name.

The teacher moved on with her teaching and Tommy exhaled, his chest tight. It haunted him having nineteen people dead over a revolution he partook in, but over three hundred... His

people were massacred. There weren't even that many people in his nation when they secured independence the first time.

"You okay?" Ranboo asked, his gloved hand still grasped in Tommy's.

"Yeah. Thanks, big man," he replied, yet the tremble in his voice said the opposite.

Tubbo leaned closer, brushing against Tommy's shoulder.

"I will beat her up for you," Tubbo said, rather loudly. But, he didn't seem to care.

"She's a teacher who is also taller than you," Ranboo quipped back.

"I will get you to beat her up."

"That's assault."

"Fine. I will become a destructive force in all her lessons, making her life a living hell until the day she quits." Tubbo beamed as Ranboo nodded at him.

"That's more like it," Tommy added, resting back in his chair.

It was safe to say that Tommy's last day of school ended badly after the shit-fest of history class. Tubbo didn't stop talking during the rest of the lesson no matter the warnings he received from Miss Allingham and ended up getting sent out when he called her a 'wank-stain'. To be honest, she had it coming since she interrupted his rant about how many nuclear weapons countries had around the world. It had Tommy's full attention, even if it slightly disturbed him that Tubbo knew this much about the topic.

The dread caused by that class didn't leave his body though when he was back at the house in the living room. He was tempted to research the details of the Final L'Manberg War since over three hundred people dying didn't seem real to him. He didn't know much about what happened after his death, he didn't know how Snowchester was founded (only that Tobias did so after the wars), he didn't know what happened to his father, to Tobias, to the people he considered friends once—before they abandoned him in exile. But reading about the tragic fate of the nation your brother founded didn't appeal to him.

"You alright?" Techno's voice made him jump out of his seat. The man wore sports gear with a case hung around his shoulder, big enough to carry a guitar in.

"No," Tommy said. "My history teacher decided to be a massive prick on my last day and Phil should be glad he didn't receive a call about a homicide."

“Well.” Techno stood there, not knowing what to do with this information. “You doing anything right now?”

“Nope.”

“Wanna come fencing?”

Tommy immediately got up, gaping at him. “Fuck yes. Sign me up.”

“Get changed into something else and meet me in the car.”

He ran up those stairs and changed faster than he ever had in any life he lived.

His excitement stemmed from both being able to do something with Techno and because he used to do fencing during his Orpheus life in France with Deo. It was with an épée sword, not a sabre though. Plus, they did it in alleyways rather than training rooms that looked pretentious and expensive as fuck.

Techno had sorted out a fencing kit for him and placed a sabre in his hands. It was lighter than an épée. He tilted the sword to get used to the weight.

“Do you know how fencing works?” Techno asked, tying the straps on Tommy’s gloves.

“I only know épée fencing. Are there any differences?”

“There’s a right of way rule; if both of us strike each other at the same time, the point is awarded to the person who began their attack first,” Techno explained. “Sabre fencing more focuses on cutting and thrusting. Strikes beneath the waist and hands don’t count. But you can use both the blade and tip to score, unlike with the épée.”

“Is that why they called you the Blade when you walked in here?” There were only a couple of other people in the training room and Techno caught all their attention as they entered. He was popular here, it seemed.

“I am known to abuse the blade of the sabre, yes.” Techno’s mouth upturned, displaying pride. “Oh, and it’s easier to attack than to defend.”

“Of course you prefer the more violent version of fencing,” Tommy scoffed as Techno smirked at him, not denying it.

“Russ, can you referee for us?” an older man strolled towards them and gave them a thumbs up.

Tommy and Techno met in the middle of the piste fencing mat and fist-bumped (neither of them liked the traditional salute you had to do before the match began).

“En-garde,” Russ announced. Tommy put on his helmet and took his place on the mat. “Pret, allez.”

Within a second, his opponent's blade had already smacked him around the face. Techno's scoring light lit up.

"What in the—"

"Return to your en-garde line," Techno said, satisfied.

The round begun again and Tommy stepped back, narrowly avoiding the sabre aimed for his chest, parrying the sword, causing Techno to disengage. Yet, the round still ended with Tommy's arse being beat as the man fucking lunged at him, striking him on the shoulder.

"Try to riposte after you parry next time," Techno advised, causing Tommy to glare at him. If Clementine were here, she'd say another one of her buzzwords.

Tommy tried to do what Techno told him to, but the dickhead just deflected his sabre and hit him again.

"You are a bitch."

"Come on, at least get a point," Techno taunted, clearly enjoying himself.

"Alright, you little bitch, I will."

And Tommy, in fact, did not. Instead, Techno practically pushed Tommy off the mat without touching him, scoring a point. It wasn't his fault that the guy was intimidating with a sword in his hand and kept leaping at him, displacing every single target area Tommy tried to hit.

"A minute break," Russ said. Tommy sighed as that meant Techno had got eight strikes on him so far.

"You're not bad, you know," Techno took off his helmet.

"You are literally wrecking me right now, you egotistical prick."

"Okay, yeah you're kinda bad," Techno grinned at Tommy, who flipped him off. "But you're holding off well against me."

"Can I at least start the attack next round?"

"Fine. I'll play defence," Techno said. "Y'know, if you manage to get at least four hits on me before I get fifteen on you, we can make this a weekly thing."

"I am going to get better than you someday."

"You'd have to train for a hundred years," Techno declared, as confident as ever.

Tommy's grin sharpened. "That won't be a problem."

Techno frowned at him before rolling his eyes. "Break's over. Come on, up."

Tommy was better at attacking than defence with how he managed to score on his opponent five times—Techno attempted to hide his surprise but failed. Tommy’s bruised ego replenished as soon as Techno was forced to not attack first.

When the match had finished with Techno ultimately winning, fifteen to five, they shook hands and got changed out of the protective attire.

“Did you have fun?” Techno asked as he packed his sabre pack into its case.

“Yeah. You fucking bruised me though.” Tommy pointed to the red mark forming on his collarbone.

Techno poked at the red mark, laughing when Tommy slapped his hand away. “Same time next week?”

“Yep. But I’m attacking first.”

“Bruh.”

Chapter 9

If you would have told Tommy that decorating a room took this much effort, he would have called up one of those celebrities on TV to do it for him. But generally, the people chosen for those shows had sob stories and he didn't know if being cursed to go through puberty over and over again was the kind of sob story they were looking for. Having to revisit the embarrassment of your voice cracking in the middle of a sentence sounded depressing enough.

The box of LED lights that Phil had bought for him remained unopened because he refused to set that up himself. He could get Ranboo to do it, the fucker was tall enough to reach the ceiling and if God made someone *that* tall, forced labour was a fair consequence.

Tommy peeled the back off an adhesive strip and stuck it on the wall. All the drawings and images he had gathered from his time at school sat on the end of the bed. Most of them were things Tubbo had thrown at him whilst in maths class, which ranged from his attempted spelling at German words to a drawing of the Eifel Tower (it was the wrong shape, but all that mattered was that he tried).

He didn't have an artistic approach to where he was going to stick these things, but doing it randomly seemed to fit the aesthetic he wanted.

"Please for the love of God, stick the pictures so they aren't wonky." Tommy yelped out at the sudden voice over his shoulder. He spun around and punched Wilbur in the shoulder. He didn't even notice the man opening his bedroom door.

"You fucker!" Tommy punched him again until Wilbur stopped laughing at him.

"I came in here to ask you a very important question," Wilbur began as he took the adhesive strip box out of Tommy's hands. "What are you getting me for Christmas?"

"Uh, nothing? I don't know."

He hadn't thought about it. To be honest, it didn't even cross his mind that this household might expect Christmas presents or include him in the holiday that was only a couple of days away.

"Fine. I'll return your gift then."

Tommy stopped what he was doing and blinked at Wilbur, dumbfounded. He tried to find any indication in the man's face that Wilbur was messing with him but failed.

"You got me a Christmas present?" he asked, his voice vulnerable.

Wilbur frowned at him. "I mean, I could easily take it back into the shop—"

“No!” Tommy jumped forward and held Wilbur in place with his hands on his shoulders. “Nope, you’re giving me that shit.”

“Fine,” Wilbur said, grinning. “I won’t resell your present.”

“And I keep it?” Tommy asked, trying to keep his excitement to himself.

“Of course you keep it. Why would I take it back?”

Tommy dropped his hands from Wilbur’s shoulders. “It’s something the last family did.”

Christmas was just another cash-grab whilst living in a household that exploited foster children and their glee for a festive holiday for views and subscribers on a shit YouTube vlogging channel. Decorations were placed in angles only the camera would view, empty boxes plastered with expensive gift wrapping sat under the Christmas tree that the children weren’t allowed to go near.

“You keep them,” Wilbur confirmed again, more concerned than before. “I’ve stuck all the strips straight now. Have fun decorating.”

Ignoring Wilbur’s quick exit, Tommy went back to decorating.

The last picture he stuck up before dealing with the LED lights was Tubbo’s drawing of a rocket ship, which had a stick man attached to the side of it (Tubbo later clarified that it was supposed to be Ranboo). Later when he finished setting up the LED lights without blowing up the house, he unlocked his phone and opened the Notes app, creating a new one named ‘Christmas present ideas’. He had Phil and Techno sorted but couldn’t think of anything for Wilbur. Besides maybe a slap across the face. That didn’t seem appropriate for Christmas though.

As usual, Tommy burst into Wilbur’s room unannounced. “Dickhead, what do you want for —”

Familiar voices coming from the speakers left him frozen.

“Why the fuck are you watching them?” he demanded. His heart clenching at the sight of the YouTube video displayed on Wilbur’s screen. The sound of their voices made him sick to his stomach. A frame appeared on the screen and embarrassment flowed through him as he recognised the child crying in the video, as he recognised *himself*.

Wilbur rushed to turn off his computer but Tommy pushed him away from it. His face burned as he read the title:

Family Vloggers Turned Criminals: The Morrison’s Scandal.

“Why- why are you watching that?” Tommy stammered on his words as Wilbur stared at him, face covered in pity.

“Tommy, I didn’t mean to—”

The video continued playing and a picture of the parents appeared on the screen, the people responsible for taking Tommy's fifth chance of youth away. He wanted to throw up.

Humiliation pricked at his skin, his throat closed up. Wilbur paused the video. Those videos were supposed to be deleted, gone from the internet for no one to fucking see anymore, but even after he got away from those vile fucking people, it wouldn't leave him alone. And even worse, it was Wilbur, the person he was probably most close to within this house, who saw him like *that*.

Wilbur stood up from his desk chair, guilt-ridden. "I was just curious and—"

"Were you *that* curious that you decided to dig into the shit I went through? Was reading all about it on my file not invasive enough for you?" Tommy spat, hating the horror in Wilbur's eyes.

Wilbur was supposed to be different, he wasn't supposed to see him as this little naïve child, who was abused and used for *entertainment*.

"I leave your past alone with all the weird and confusing shit you pull, and you do *this*," the volume in Tommy's voice grew with every quivering breath, so much that the entire house could hear, but he didn't care. "I don't dig into your issues, like how you fight with Phil, your failed therapy and why you sometimes stink of fucking weed and other shit. But you can't do the same for me."

"Tommy, Tommy, I know it's bad but I just- I didn't want to make Christmas like they did and then this came up and—" Wilbur shrunk into himself.

"...what?" Tommy whispered, his breathing still harsh, the blood in his face pulsing.

"—and then this video kept talking about how it was a child labour scheme that the dad came up with to fix his failing marriage, and that their son was violent towards you and the other foster children in that home and—" Tommy stood, helpless, as the man pushed himself into a panicked state. "I just wanted to know what to avoid, to not ruin it for you."

"Wilbur..." Tommy trailed off, stepping closer to him.

Wilbur, hysteric, jerked backwards and dashed towards his computer. He opened up Spotify, his cursor shaking across the screen.

"You can look through it," Wilbur said, his voice breaking. He hovered over the drafted album named 'Your City Gave Me Asthma'.

Tommy took the mouse off him.

"Wilbur, stop. Calm down." He moved Wilbur so he was sitting in his desk chair. "You don't want to show me that, alright? And you don't have to just because you found out shit about me."

"But—"

“Shut the fuck up,” he said with no heat. He put his hands on Wilbur’s shoulders like he did earlier, though this time for comfort. “Let’s drop this, okay? Let’s pretend this never happened.”

Wilbur nodded, not trusting himself to speak. Tommy picked up one of the many half-drunken bottles of water from the windowsill and gave it to him.

“I’m sorry—”

“It’s fine, it’s fine,” he repeated, staring Wilbur in the eyes as the other tried to calm himself down.

Wilbur leaned forward, his side brushing against Tommy. He waited until Wilbur stopped shaking to pull away.

“Now, I’m gonna do what I was originally going to do when I came into your dumbass bedroom.” Tommy closed Spotify and opened up Google. “I have an idea for Techno and I need your help finding one with the most shit name.”

Tommy tightened his coat around him and entered the café, ignoring the ‘closed’ sign on the door. He walked towards the back kitchen area to see Niki washing up the rest of the cutlery that couldn’t fit in the dishwasher. She had yellow gloves on that went up to her elbow and the normal jewellery she wore was next to the sink. He never realised how many bracelets she had until they were piled onto each other.

He wondered if he should get her something for Christmas, or even to say thank you for ruining Linda’s day. Maybe another piece of jewellery to add to her never-ending collection would be nice.

“Tommy, are you here to pester me again as I close shop?” Niki asked, knowing he was there without having to look at him.

He jumped up and sat on the counter. “Yep. The house is empty and I am bored.”

“Where did everyone else go?”

“Phil needed to go P.C World before it closed, Techno’s fencing, and Wilbur is in his shed,” Tommy said. He only had a couple of hours until his curfew, so bothering Niki was something he liked to do because she was too nice to tell him to fuck off.

“Take my advice and never go into his shed. He calls it the Doom Shack for a reason.” Niki tried to sound as ominous as possible, but the two just burst into laughter as soon as the words ‘Doom Shack’ left her mouth.

“Why are you working during Christmas break, anyway?”

“I need money.”

“No offence but your family gives off major landlord energy.” Even though it was rude to say, he was correct. He liked judging people by the state of their houses, though Benson was an anomaly in this instance. Landlords normally don’t have ducks as pets.

“We’re financially stable, don’t worry, it’s more to make up to my parents,” Niki explained, finishing with the final plates she had to clean. “I’m adopted if the lack of German accent with the rest of my family isn’t obvious enough. They did a lot to get me here, so this is my way of repaying them.”

“You don’t keep some of the money for yourself?”

“No, I do that as well. How else would I fund the amount of hair dye I need?” Niki attempted to throw her hair behind her shoulder to prove a point but ended up wetting it since she had gloves on. Tommy giggled as she cursed under her breath.

“Why pink?” Tommy asked as she took off her gloves and rolled down her sleeves.

“It was blonde with dark strips at the front before.”

“Oh, the TikTok hair,” he interrupted. Clementine showed him that hairstyle during class; she got her phone taken away but she said it was worth it.

“Yeah and I asked Techno what colour next and he wanted us to match.”

Now Tommy expressed his affection for his friends in many ways, like forced labour (exhibit, Ranboo), insulting them (Ranboo again), annoying them with languages they cannot read (Tubbo this time) and violence (everyone but Niki). Yet, he would never dye his hair to display appreciation for a friend.

“Since you’re here, can you help me clean up? I’m already behind schedule,” Niki asked as she circled around him and walked behind the shop counter.

“Sure, if you pay me,” he said. He was joking but he wouldn’t deny money if Niki decided to give it to him.

“I’ll owe you a favour in the future that you can cash in at any time.”

“Deal,” he agreed, shaking her hand. A favour from the Niki herself was worth having to clean and stack up tables.

Tommy woke up drowning.

Saltwater pricked at his eyes and choked his lungs. He swam up, relief clinging onto him as he couldn't feel the burden of his notebook at his side. Good, he wasn't in exile again.

Air welcomed him; he could breathe again. The sky was black, but not like the night. Fuck, he was dreaming.

"Dream you fucking bitch!" he yelled, water breaching into his mouth as he tried to keep himself afloat. "As if drowning me once wasn't enough!"

A bright light appeared in the void sky.

Tommy hurried towards it, ignoring the waking memories that trembled his skin with every kick of his legs. The sensation of fighting against the sea current centuries ago never left him.

A boat rendered in the distance and he thrashed against the water, hurrying towards the ladder on the side. He pulled himself up, coughing the water out of his lungs as he collapsed on the boat floor. His wet clothes weighed him down as he sat back up and scoured his surroundings.

Before he could regain his breath, the boat started to move forward, crashing against the sea waves that roughened the second Tommy escaped the water's grasp.

"Why the fuck am I sailing?" Tommy asked. He didn't have time for these obscure metaphors Dream gave him. He preferred an empty void—something he had grown used to over the years—to a fucking boat trip.

Another light appeared in the distance, though, it was more red and yellow than the other light. The boat abruptly stopped, throwing Tommy forward. He raced to the side of the boat and frowned. Despite how he was in the middle of the ocean a minute ago, he was now at the shore.

He jumped onto the seashore, his bare feet wincing against the gritted sand. He ran towards the light, the cold finally reaching his body. Annoyance filled him as he recognised the man sitting next to the firepit.

"Dream, you didn't have to drown me to have me go camping with you," Tommy complained as he touched the fabric of the tents. The masked man's amulet glinted in the darkness, reflecting the flames in front of him.

"Pay attention," was all Dream said, his head focused on the firepit. Tommy scowled at him and sat down next to him and stared into the fire, trying to see what was so interesting that it captivated the God.

"To what?" Tommy asked. The waves relaxed, the tide exposing more sand to his eyes. This was a weird beach.

Dream turned and studied him. Tommy jerking back at the analytic stare from the mask. The smile carved into it always disturbed him.

“Out of all the others, you really are the dumbest.”

Tommy gawked at him, offended. “I’m sorry that I don’t have a million IQ like you dickhead.”

The firepit dimmed and Tommy’s eyes stung with drowsiness. Even though he was close to the flames, the heat didn’t warm him up.

“I’m doing everything I can without breaking my own rules, Tommy.” Dream sighed, being as vague as usual.

“If you created the rules, then why can’t you break them?”

“You may be special Tommy, but even I can’t break those just for you.”

He glared at Dream, not liking the soft tone of his voice. This was the same man who killed and cursed him. Why was he conversing with him as if they were best friends? A part of Tommy wanted this to be all over, for the anger and betrayal rooted deep in his heart to give out and forget the damage caused. But he never did listen to himself.

“Why am I here?” Tommy asked, his hands gripping the textured sand. “Because I don’t think your answer is wanting a beach party.”

He flinched as his own words registered.

“Wow, a beach party,” he scoffed, liking how Dream shuffled, uncomfortable. “Do you remember that, Dream? That little *thing* you did to me in exile where you made me believe that everyone had abandoned me, that no one in this sick fucking world cared about me.”

He threw sand at the fire, diminishing it more. “Sure, you were right in the end, but you did mess with those invites. I’m not fucking dumb.”

“Even after all these years, you still bring that up?” Dream said.

“Not to sound like a prick but you did drive me to think about killing myself, so maybe I have the right to bring it up even if it’s a small inconvenience for you to remember about.”

The argument Tommy had on his tongue died as Dream faced the fire again. He had more words to say, more lines to scream until his head pounded and could no longer think about what Dream had once put him through. But there was no point arguing with a God who wasn’t haunted by morality and human compassion.

He fought against the tiredness in his eyes, which kept shutting against his will.

“You’re tired, Tommy,” Dream murmured, moving aside so Tommy could lay down on dry sand. “It’s okay to sleep here.”

“Why should I trust you?” Tommy mumbled, caving into himself as he tried to get comfortable.

“I’m the only one who understands you in this world,” Dream said, gazing down at him.

Tommy rolled his eyes and rested on the floor.

As sleep overwhelmed him, Dream wrapped his cloak around the boy’s shivering body.

Chapter 10

Tommy did not care that it was Christmas, he refused to get out of bed. He had turned off his alarm and thrown his phone across the room, but it still kept ringing. It took Wilbur yelling at him through the walls for him to roll out of bed and grab his phone.

Bench Trio:

Ranboo: Merry Christmas (Tubbo says it as well!)

Tommy: merry christmas boob boy.

Ranboo: The audacity you have after I just said something nice to you.

Tommy: see you lads on new year's eve :D

After he freshened himself up, he picked up the bag of presents he had wrapped (he asked Phil to do it for him but the man refused—apparently everyone in this household was bad at wrapping as well) and went downstairs.

He wasn't sure what disturbed him more, the sight of seeing Techno assaulting the glitter tinsel on the Christmas tree or that the man was wearing a Santa onesie. The safe choice was both. Ignoring all *that*, Tommy entered the kitchen and Phil was in the middle of preparing the food for Christmas dinner.

"Merry Christmas, I was wondering when you'd bother getting up," Phil greeted as he checked on the turkey in the oven.

"Is it really my fault that Wilbur made me stay up until midnight just so he could tell me that Santa wasn't real the second it turned Christmas day?"

"He did that?"

"Yep," Tommy said, still bitter. "He told me he had something really important to tell me and it was that bullshit."

He followed Phil out of the kitchen, who started setting up the table.

"Is there any chance I can spit in his food or would he notice?" Tommy asked as nonchalantly as possible.

"Mate, not on Christmas," Phil sighed.

"So I can do it tomorrow?"

“Shut.”

Tommy dropped the subject. He put the Christmas crackers next to the plates Phil had placed down. He frowned at the number on the table. He counted five, with the seat next to Phil, which was normally empty, having a plate in front of it.

“Is someone else joining us for dinner?” Tommy asked. Phil looked at him confused, so he pointed at the fifth plate, causing Phil to freeze in place.

“Oh right, I must have miscounted.” Phil didn’t make any move to get rid of the extra plate, he just stared at it for a moment.

“Why don’t you help Techno detangle himself from the Christmas tree and I’ll finish setting up the table?” Tommy offered, bewildered by the other’s reaction. Phil nodded, still lost in thought, and made his way into the living room.

Tommy finished with the table and examined the Christmas decorations around the house. It surprised him that none of it reminded him of the previous foster home. The presents were scattered around the fireplace instead of piled under the tree, they were even wrapped in different kinds of wrapping paper (some had the words ‘happy birthday’ on them), and the ornaments on the tree were non-traditional—especially the ones which had swearwords on them. This was probably Wilbur’s doing, at least he learnt something whilst breaching his privacy with that fucking YouTube video; Tommy was still bothered by that, but it’s not something either of them could take back.

He stopped looking at the decorations and faced Techno, who was now detangled from the tree and took to glaring at it instead. “Should I wake Wilbur?”

“No, I’ll do it. He’ll try to kick you,” Techno said.

“Why would you volunteer to wake him up then?”

“I kick back harder,” Techno deadpanned.

Phil didn’t even seem fazed as he found a good radio channel on the TV. When Wilbur came down the stairs, rubbing at his side with a disgruntled expression, the smugness Techno displayed explained it all.

“Now that I am here, the best part of Christmas can commence,” Wilbur said, rushing towards the fireplace. “Gimme gifts.”

They all sat on the sofas and Tommy watched them all go through the presents they received, but the nerves got to him as soon as the gifts he placed down were next. He regretted writing his name in red sharpie on top of their presents now, it would’ve been better anonymous, then if they hated it, they wouldn’t know it was him.

Phil opened his first and gaped at what he saw. “You did not.”

“Look, I don’t support anime, but—”

“You got me the hat.” The green and white striped bucket hat from that anime Phil never stopped talking about laid in his hands. The man placed it on his head, grinning. “Thanks, mate.”

“Weebza,” Wilbur declared.

“You kinda do look like the blonde guy from Bleach now.”

“It’s the hair.”

Techno was next and he frowned at the polar bear plushie he unwrapped. “Why did you get me a toy?”

“It’s not a toy!” Tommy argued, pointing at the piece of paper Techno had disregarded. It was a certificate.

“You adopted a polar bear for me?”

“Yep!”

“Named Steve?”

Tommy laughed at the surprised fondness in Techno’s voice.

“I could have adopted one that you could visit but I don’t support zoos, so Steve is in the Antarctic.”

“Good. That’s where he should be.” Techno held the bear closer to his chest, his fingers stroking the white fur. “Thank you for Steve.”

Tommy tried to ignore the warmth in his chest as neither of the two disliked the presents he bought. Wilbur was last and tore into the paper as if it personally offended him, only to stop when he uncovered the item in his hand. His eyes began to water.

“Will?” Phil said, concerned.

“You fucking legend.” Wilbur sprung forward and wrapped his arms around Tommy, knocking the boy back. “You really- you did that.”

In his hands was an album case, which was newly painted; it had a maroon coloured background with a white cat squashed by an anvil in the middle, the caption ‘Are you alright?’ written below it.

“I mean, your first song on the album started with a cat dying, so—”

Wilbur tightened the hug, wetting Tommy’s shoulder with his tears. He let go and smiled at the art.

“What is it?”

“Album art for my band,” Wilbur sniffed, wiping his eyes with his sleeve. “Dude, you- thank you.”

“Can we eat now?” Tommy asked, beaming at the three.

“You haven’t opened your presents yet,” Phil said, pushing a bag in front of him.

“Presents? Like more than one?” Tommy just thought Wilbur got him something.

“Yeah dickhead, we all got you something.” Wilbur threw a package at him. “Open it.”

It was a cyan sweatshirt that looked similar to those fashion boards on Pinterest. He held it up against his chest.

“Oh no. He’s making you dress like him, Tommy,” Techno groaned.

“I have taste and this poor boy does not. He needs help and these clothes will do so.”

“Free clothes is a nice way to tell me I have no sense of fashion,” Tommy agreed, searching through the bag of clothes. “Thank you, Will.” Wilbur saluted back, proud.

“Now, with my gift to you, I can’t physically wrap it so I’ll just tell you,” Phil said. “I coded some Minecraft mods for you.”

Tommy gawked at him in awe. “Seriously?”

“Yep.”

“What mods?”

“That morph one you never shut up about and a couple others.”

“Philza Minecraft even though you are close to death since you are a senile man, I will never forget this act of kindness,” Tommy said as he jumped forward and grabbed the man’s hands, shaking them.

“So Will gets a thank you and I get a reminder of my old age?”

“Also, yeah, thank you. I’m forcing you to play it with me.” Tommy dropped Phil’s hands and grinned to himself. Minecraft mods by the creator of Minecraft himself; Tubbo was gonna flip his shit.

“Alright, my go. Be careful opening it.” Techno handed him a massive case that he didn’t bother to wrap. There was an attempt though, with the gift bow stuck on the side.

Tommy unzipped the case and carefully picked up what was inside by its blue handle. It was a fencing sabre.

“I would’ve gotten you a red handle but red is the Blade’s colour,” Techno explained.

“I’ve never got a sword for Christmas before.” Tommy placed the sabre down. “Can I hug you?”

“No.” Techno shuffled backwards away from him.

Tommy inched closer. “I’m going to hug you.”

“Fine.”

Techno stiffened as Tommy did so, his arms stuck by his side but reluctantly, he put them around Tommy. Wilbur muffled his laughter at the sight of Techno being forced to partake in physical affection.

“I can tell all your fencing buddies now that the Blade has a soft spot,” Tommy said, patting Techno on the shoulder.

“I will kill you.”

“Sure, sure.” Techno snatched the sabre by the handle. “Okay, maybe you will—”

Tommy broke off running whilst Techno chased after him, the sword held high.

“Friendly fire is off!” Wilbur called out, laughing at Tommy’s screams.

“Boys! Don’t run with fucking swords in the house!”

“But it’s Christmas,” Techno yelled back.

“That makes it even worse, you chaotic shits!”

Later, Tommy sat at the head of the table, wearing one of the new shirts Wilbur bought him, and with a plaster on his hand (Techno had nicked him with the sabre when Tommy bet that he wouldn’t—spoiler, the fucker did).

Wilbur forced them all to read only the first part of the jokes that came in their Christmas crackers. Tommy and Wilbur found it funnier than it should have been and may have been the cause for Phil to open the wine bottle a little early, but it was funny. Techno had asked if it was possible to harm someone with Christmas decorations and clarified that it was completely *unrelated* to how annoying the two were being, yet the death glares directed towards them told another story.

Either way, Christmas dinner went fine. Even if it ended with Tommy almost pissing himself over the shit Wilbur kept whispering to him, Techno’s sigh count going into the hundreds and a slightly tipsy Phil. But apparently, this was normal for the Craft household.

By the time it was evening, the four had collapsed onto the sofas and turned on the TV to the channels that played reruns of Christmas films until January. Tommy shared the sofa with Phil, who had his new bucket hat on. It covered his eyes so he wasn’t even watching the film, which was good since Tommy preferred that to Wilbur’s unwanted commentary and Techno throwing popcorn at the screen when he declared a scene as ‘cringe’.

“Did you have a nice day?” Phil murmured, his words slightly slurred but Tommy wasn’t bothered. He would be lying to himself if alcohol and its influence didn’t scare him, yet it was Phil, someone he trusted.

“Yeah,” he replied, shuffling closer to him. “Yeah, I did.”

“That’s good.” Phil rested his head on Tommy’s shoulder, kicking his feet out to rest on the footstool. “I’m glad.”

Tommy smiled down at the man. “Thank you.”

“For what?”

“For this.”

“Aww, mate,” Phil cooed, causing Tommy’s face to redden.

“Don’t *aww* me. Nothing is cute or wholesome about this.”

Phil laughed into his shoulder.

Tommy didn’t know how he fell asleep whilst Wilbur shouted at the TV for how shit the remake of ‘Home Alone’ was and Techno trying to aim popcorn on top of Phil’s bucket hat. But he somehow did.

“Techno, for the last time, we are not flying to Antarctica just so you can see Steve,” Phil groaned as he prepared the living room for the guests scheduled to come over to celebrate New Year’s Eve.

Tommy was helping him set everything up since he owed it to him. Phil’s hair was still damp from when Tommy had dunked snow on his head earlier (it had snowed for thirty minutes and everyone made the best out of it).

“But surely, if he’s adopted in my name, I get the right to visit him.” Techno propped up his polar bear on the seat next to him. “He’s my emotional support bear, I will do anything to pet him.”

“You can’t pet a polar bear.”

“Try me,” Techno shot back. “I will start an Empire in Antarctica just so Steve is safe from... what’s the effects of global warming in the Artic?”

“Something about ice caps melting,” Tommy answered. “Isn’t that how the Titanic sunk?”

Phil stopped setting drinks to stare at Tommy with disappointment. “What the- no.”

“Have you ever noticed that the IQ of the conversation drops when Tommy joins it?” Techno said. “Why are you booing? I’m right.”

“I could just take Steve back. Both the plushie and the actual bear.” Tommy threatened, bringing his hand closer to the polar bear before Techno snatched it away from his reach.

“Do that and you’re dead.”

“I make *one* joke about taking a man’s bear away and I get death threats. This is a toxic and unhealthy environment.”

The doorbell saved Tommy from Techno inevitably killing him. Tubbo, Ranboo and Niki were at the door. Tommy eyed the vodka in Niki’s hands as he let them in. Well, it *was* a party, he should’ve expected this.

“We are here to celebrate the birthday of the year,” Ranboo said as he took his coat off.

“Ranboo, stop being quirky. It’s called New Year’s Eve,” Tubbo rebuked. “Come on Tommy, Secret Santa time.”

He couldn’t believe he was being pushed around in his *own* house by a boy shorter than him. Absolutely humiliating.

“It isn’t really a secret though. I realised this the other day. There’s only three of us so we’d know who would have who.” Ranboo said.

“You must be fun at parties,” Tommy teased.

“I can’t believe I had to get a gift for someone who bullies me on a daily basis.”

“I have to humble you somehow.” Tommy took the gift bag from him and searched inside. He picked up a stress ball with Ranboo’s face (mask and all) printed on it. He squeezed it in his hands, snorting as Ranboo’s printed face disfigured itself.

“It’s so you don’t injure your hands.” He stared down at the fingernail scars in his palms and squeezed the ball again. Tommy didn’t expect something so thoughtful.

“Thank you. Really, thank you,” he said as he side-hugged him—blame Ranboo’s height for why a normal hug wouldn’t work.

“Now, where’s my present?” Tubbo asked, holding out his arms. Tommy gave him a box.

“I remembered you talking about them on the first day I met you,” Tommy said as Tubbo attacked the Amazon box.

Tubbo gasped as he recognised the rainbow titanium-coated knife set he had on his Amazon wish list. The utter glee on his face should have worried Tommy since it was caused by sharp weapons, but maybe if Tubbo was taller, it would’ve done so.

“Oh my God. I can cut tomatoes now.” Tommy expected some sort of thanks and not *that* coming out of Tubbo’s mouth.

“And you couldn’t before?” Ranboo asked, stepping away from the boy with knives in his hands.

“It matters more, the knives make it meaningful.” Tubbo pointed a knife at Tommy, scaring the living hell out of him. “I will make you tomato salad with these knives.”

“I don’t like tomatoes.”

“I didn’t say you could eat it,” Tubbo said.

Tommy opened his mouth to ask him to elaborate on what he meant but decided not to. The answer would probably confuse him more.

Instead, he turned to Ranboo. “What did Tubbo get you for Secret Santa?”

“He bought me a cut-out board of Barack Obama because I’m American.” Tommy blinked at him, stumped. “I have to sleep with the forty-fourth US President staring at me.”

“You’ve unlocked a new fear for me.”

Niki came into the kitchen and stared at her brother, who was still enticed by fucking cutlery. “I’m not responsible for Tubbo tonight. If he stabs someone, that’s on you guys.”

Tommy nodded, taking the responsibility.

“Anyway, Tommy. I got you something,” Niki said.

“Wait, I got you something too!” Tommy put the bracelet Wilbur helped him buy in her hand. “I attempted to wrap it but that failed, so it’s a naked bracelet.”

She put the bracelet around her right wrist, smiling down at it. “Thank you, Tommy. Here, this is for you.”

Tommy frowned at the knitted wholly hat.

“No offence, but my head isn’t that small.”

“It’s for Henry.” A hat for his cow plushie? Wait.

His face flushed with embarrassment. “How do you know about Henry?”

“Techno told me.”

“How does he know?” Tommy demanded, his voice louder.

“Wilbur told him.”

“HOW DOES—”

“Phil.”

“For fuck’s sake!”

Thankfully, Tommy’s embarrassment and the teasing he suffered from everyone for having a stuffed animal at the age of fifteen died down when Wilbur decided that the music on the radio channels was shit and did his own performance.

He began with ‘One Day’, which Niki joined in with. By the time he finished his album, you could no longer understand a word he sang since he had started drinking as soon as Phil turned on the disco lights in the living room. Though, his guitar playing somehow stayed consistent.

Now, Wilbur’s Spotify playlist named ‘Party Music To Help Forget about Overpopulation’ played. He had no idea how this playlist had over a thousand likes.

Tommy sat on the sofa with Ranboo as Tubbo set up the Wii.

“Now this isn’t a Cause for Concern but should Wilbur be drinking that much?” Ranboo asked as Wilbur downed another shot of Vodka. Ranboo had been making puns for the past half an hour and had started to use song names—even though it irritated Tommy, it distracted him from the chaos Wilbur was causing.

“Make a pun about Sex Sells, I bet you won’t, you fucking pussy,” Tommy challenged.

Ranboo paused. “One Day I will.”

“You disgust me.”

“I mean, you did Taunt me to make more jokes—”

“Ranboo shut up and help me set this up,” Tubbo said from the floor. Ranboo grumbled under his breath about how no one here appreciated him or his elite humour as he went to help.

No longer placed under the torture of Ranboo’s puns and dad jokes, Tommy got up, only to immediately be tackled back down.

“Wilbur, what the fuck?” Tommy protested, trying to breathe out of his mouth to avoid the smell of alcohol. But that didn’t work as Wilbur proceeded to floor him, choking the air out of him.

“You alright, Toms?” Wilbur clung his arms around Tommy’s shoulders.

He ignored how his chest tightened, though not uncomfortably, at the new nickname. Or maybe it was because he just got *floored*.

“Besides having you crush me, I’m fine. Why wouldn’t I be?” he said.

“I don’t know, just wanted to ask.”

As Tommy glanced down at him, Wilbur had the same look on his face that he did when he was on the brink of having a breakdown over watching that YouTube video about Tommy’s last foster home.

“You still feel guilty, don’t you?” Tommy asked, although he already knew the answer.

Wilbur nodded, his head bashing against Tommy’s collarbone. “What if I tell you a secret that no one knows?”

“Dude, you’re drunk. You saying shit isn’t going to take back what you did.”

“Let me try.” Tommy tried to cover up his mouth but Wilbur fought against his hands. “Did-did you know that I’ve been lying to Dad this entire time because—”

“Wilbur.”

“—I’ve been throwing away those fucking tablets the second he tried to make me take them again. They make me feel like a horse- no the thing that kills horses. Like a tranquiliser,” Wilbur snorted. “Don’t ask how I know what that feels like, year twelve was a funny experience.”

Tommy picked Wilbur up from the floor. It was too late in the night to be dealing with this shit.

“We’re getting some water in your system and I’m gonna pretend you just didn’t tell me that.”

“Shh, it’s a secret.” Wilbur let himself be led into the kitchen and drunk the water Tommy shoved into his hands (even though half of it spilt down his shirt). “I’m glad Dad’s fostering you.”

“Shut the fuck up.”

Wilbur pinched at Tommy’s cheeks. “Aww, is little Tommy embarrassed? Little baby man, little—”

“I hate you.”

Techno walked in with plates in his hands.

“Technoblade! My big brother!” Wilbur yelled right in Tommy’s ears.

“I’m not your brother and I’m only slightly older than you,” Techno said as he put the plates in the sink, unphased by Wilbur’s drunken state.

“You wound me.”

“Techno, help.” Tommy struggled to keep Wilbur standing up straight as the man decided that his legs weren’t important to use.

“Go back in, they’re playing Wii baseball.” Techno took Wilbur from him. “I’ll handle this mess.”

“I’m not a mess.”

“Sure.”

A bit shaken by the entire ordeal, Tommy went back into the living room. Tubbo and Ranboo were currently being shit at Wii baseball. It was interesting to watch, especially as Ranboo moved his Wii remote in weird positions and Tubbo missed every shot.

“How can one man be so bad at baseball?” Ranboo shouted. “Just hit the ball!”

“I am *trying*.” Tubbo appeared seconds away from smacking Ranboo with his remote.

Tommy snorted to himself and sat down on the table that Niki and Phil were at. They were playing some type of card game.

“Can I play?”

“Yeah sure.”

And then, with pride, he lost every game of Old Maid until the countdown for New Year’s Day began on the TV.

Tommy stood with his arms around Phil and Niki’s shoulders as the countdown reached zero. Fireworks sounded, just quiet enough to not remind him of a certain event in his Theseus life, and he joined the hollering of the room, a wide smile on his face.

Out of all the lives Tommy had lived, he finally found one where he wanted to stay.

Chapter 11

Tommy wanted to know what he did wrong. He obviously did *something* for the entire household to act off with him. Just last week, Christmas break had ended and it was fine. But something must've happened, whether it was Tommy's fault or not.

It started with Phil not asking how his day went at school when he got back. The first time Tommy wrote it off as him being busy. But the third time *hurt*. He sat next to the man, waiting for Phil to just acknowledge him, care enough to ask about his day. Yet, nothing happened.

He didn't realise how attached he was to the small talk that turned into an hour of conversation and laughter until silence settled in its place.

It was bad enough that the whole routine he'd grown fond of had been disturbed by Wilbur not going to school during this week. At this point, Tommy only thought he did something to Phil, that he had upset him unintentionally, and Wilbur was in another bad mood. But then Techno happened. Tommy never told the man that the only reason he got home quicker than usual—why he rushed out of the school gates to meet Wilbur in the car park—on Thursdays was because he knew the minute he'd get back, Techno would be waiting to take him fencing.

This Thursday though, he had to learn the hard way that Techno had already left to go without him. Nothing was more humiliating than getting changed and waiting downstairs only for an hour to pass by and the sinking doubt you tried to ignore from the first five minutes had won.

By Friday, Tommy had reached his breaking point. He sat at the table during breakfast with his head resting on his hand. His cheek ached from the constant biting.

Wilbur joined them for once. His arrival sparked conversation.

"Will, are you sure you want to go in today?" Phil asked, and Tommy hated how he perked up at the sound of his voice, not used to hearing it for days.

"I need to work on something," Wilbur said.

Techno sat up straighter. "That'll make it worse, Wilbur. Especially today."

Tommy scowled at the food in front of him, despite being with them for three months, he was back to the beginning, awkwardly out of the loop with where he stood within the household.

Phil faced him, his eyes tired. "Maybe it's best if you go round someone else's house after school."

"What did I do?" Tommy blurted out before he could stop himself. "You've all been acting weird this entire week. What the fuck did I do?"

“This isn’t about you, don’t worry.”

Tommy scoffed. “How can I not worry when—”

“Drop it,” Techno grunted, only fuelling Tommy’s impatience.

“Maybe you shouldn’t foster a fucking child if you’ve still got your own family problems.” Tommy glared at anyone that would meet his eye and left the table. “I’m walking to school.”

He tried to convince himself that the wetness trailing down his face was due to the rain but failed. He remembered the last time he shouted at his foster parents. That house had only lasted a week. As much as his life was destined to repeat itself, he didn’t want that part to be included.

The dread swelling in his throat didn’t leave him the entire day. He didn’t want to return to that house to see Linda Smith there, waiting with a smug look on her face, as if she’d knew he would fuck this up and get himself thrown out of a family that didn’t treat him like shit for once. Would they let him keep the gifts he got for Christmas? Would they even tell him what he did to deserve being alienated out of the blue? He wasn’t sure he wanted answers if it hurt that much just thinking about it.

“Tommy, you missed the count-in again.”

He blinked, clasping the drumsticks in his hands. He glanced at Tubbo, who was at the piano.

“Tommy?”

He stood up and grimaced at the concern written all over Tubbo’s face.

“I need a shit.”

That concern quickly changed to disgust. “Some things should be left unsaid.”

“You don’t appreciate me enough.” Tommy exited the music practice room and circled the building. He headed towards the direction of the toilets but the sound of someone singing from the last practice room stopped him.

“—don’t fucking love you.”

He ducked under where the blinds stopped in the window and Wilbur was in there with an acoustic guitar. He was the one singing.

“Shout at the walls,” a sharp inhale of breath, *“because the walls don’t fucking love you.”*

“There’s a reason—” his voice broke, it straining into a sob. Wilbur balled up his hands and rubbed harshly at his eyes, the guitar dropping on the floor.

Tommy gulped; this wasn’t something he should be seeing.

Wilbur picked up his phone and dialled a number, his shaking hands holding it up to his ear.

“Can you come drive me home?” the man sniffed into his sleeve. “Tech, it’s happening again and... and I don’t want to be alone right now.”

Before Wilbur could turn around and face the window, Tommy moved and rushed back into the music block. He didn’t know what to do, whether he should go into the last practice room and comfort Wilbur, despite how the man had been ignoring him, or if he should pretend he never saw that.

“What’s wrong?” Tubbo asked as Tommy returned, breathless.

“I just saw something I shouldn’t have.”

Tubbo rolled his eyes at him. “Don’t tell me you walked into the girl’s bathroom again.”

“No!” he gawked, face reddening. “And you promised you’d never bring that up again. It was traumatising enough the first time.”

“Then what’s up?”

Tommy sat on the drum stool. “Is there a reason why the Crafts are acting weird this week?”

Tubbo frowned and grabbed his phone, his eyes widening as he checked something.

“Oh, I forgot about that,” he said, being as vague as *they* were, which irritated Tommy even further.

“That doesn’t answer my question, Tubbo.”

“It’s not my place to say.”

Tommy silently fumed. This wasn’t something he wanted to take out on his friend, that would just add another person he cared about to the list who completely isolated him.

“Oi, dickhead, where’s the stress ball?”

Confused, Tommy looked down at his hands to see them clenched, his fingernails piercing against his skin. He retrieved the stress ball out of his pocket and compressed it in his hands.

“Happy now?” he snarked at Tubbo with no heat.

“Very,” the other replied, satisfied. “Now get on the drumkit. We need to finish this before lunch.”

He knew he was breaking Phil's rules by not replying to any of the messages or calls he got from Techno and him, but at this point, they kinda deserved it. Tommy had his own rules and randomly being a twat towards him broke one of them.

He had been walking around the town since school had finished, rather aimlessly—he had passed the café four times. It wasn't his fault that this town was fucking tiny.

By the time it had gotten darker and his legs ached, he stopped at the bench by the seawall. Instinctively, he took his notebook out of his bag and opened it to the most recent page. Last night he added another column called 'myths associated with boats/ships' because of the last Dream visit. The lad with the shit name, Jason, was on there again because of the Argo, but he didn't like how Theseus' father, Aegeus, came up during his research. The guy who was prophesied to die of grief and ended up killing himself when Theseus forgot to change the colour of his ship sails.

Not understanding an oracle about your fate and it killing you was something Tommy would rather not share with a man who drowned himself.

With one glance up at the same half-circle star constellation in the sky, he slammed the notebook shut and chucked it over the seawall. It was futile since the book would appear by his side soon, but it was more for cathartic purposes.

Tommy walked home but entered through the back way in the garden; he didn't feel like risking it if an angry Phil or Techno were waiting for him in the kitchen. The shed light was on, meaning Wilbur was doing fuck knows in there.

He paused in his step, staring at the shed in the dark. He was tempted to go in there and demand what the fuck was up with everyone but hesitated since he had witnessed Wilbur have a breakdown in music. That wasn't enough to stop him though.

He opened the door, and immediately coughed, his throat under attack from the amount of smoke in the air. Of course this prick was hotboxing. Wilbur was buried in a bean bag, a plastic bong by his side and a DS in his hands, playing Tomodachi Life (what the fuck?). He had sunglasses on, probably concealing his red eyes. Some lifting weights sat in the corner.

"What kind of crack den is this?" Tommy asked as he covered his nose with his sleeves, trying to keep his eyes from fluttering.

Wilbur put down his DS. "Doom Shack."

"Why the fuck does the sheep have a cigarette in its mouth?" he pointed at a blue, knitted sheep that laid on the other bean bag.

"That's Friend."

"Your friend's with a sheep?"

"No, that's Friend," Wilbur repeated, grinning.

As much as it was harsh to think, Tommy preferred the man crying over whatever the fuck he was doing now.

“Are you high right now?”

“Well, that’s the aim.”

Tommy glared at him. “You’re such a fucking mess.”

“At least I admit it,” Wilbur shot back, his grin widening as Tommy scowled.

“The fuck’s that supposed to mean?”

Wilbur attempted to get out of his bean bag. “You still in denial that you’re not a total fuckup?”

Tommy sprung forward, grasping Wilbur by the shoulders, and shoved him against the wall. His teeth gritted as Wilbur kept grinning at him.

“Now you’re angry,” Wilbur giggled.

“What the fuck is your problem?” he toughened his grip on Wilbur. “No actually, what the fuck is everyone’s problem? I am so *sick* of having to walk on eggshells around you all and letting you treat me like shit.”

He pushed him harsher against the shed wall, making Wilbur wince. Tommy faltered, the close proximity with Wilbur did not help the memories trying to seep themselves through the cracks in his consciousness. If he closed his eyes for a second longer, he could almost feel dried blood on his arms and the weight he held for hours.

He cleared his throat, reining his head back but held Wilbur in place.

“Ah, it makes sense now.” Wilbur had stopped laughing.

“What makes sense?”

“It’s the smell, isn’t it?” the man struggled against Tommy’s arms until he let go. Wilbur picked up the plastic bong on the counter and waved it in front of Tommy’s face, who jerked backwards. “Holy shit, it is.”

“Shut up,” Tommy muttered, his teeth still gritted.

“What does it remind you of, huh?” Wilbur placed the item back on the counter. “Maybe we have more in common than you think, Toms.”

“Shut the fuck up.”

The clipped tone in Tommy’s voice only urged Wilbur on even more.

“What drugged-up escapades have you gotten up to before coming here? What wild adventures made you hate it?”

His hands shook as he swallowed down the bile creeping up his throat. Flashes of her blonde hair and pale skin wouldn't leave his head.

“It killed her,” Tommy whispered, unshed tears welled in his eyes. The grin fell from Wilbur's face. “She- she overdosed.”

He would never forget the fear of a quiet room, too silent for someone to be breathing in there, knowing empty pill bottles and lit spoons laid on the floor.

“She was battling something she knew she wouldn't win but I didn't know that... I thought, I thought she was getting better, I- I thought I was enough that she would *stay*. And it killed her,” he exhaled sharply. “I killed her.”

He tried to stop himself from sobbing but the pain in his chest was too much. His vision blurred.

“It was my fucking money that she used, it- it was because of *me*.”

“Tommy—” he shoved Wilbur's hands off him.

“Is that what you wanted to hear?” Tommy shouted, his voice cracking. “The reason I fucking hate the smell of that shit is because it meant I was left alone in this world with the dead body of my own fucking *mother* in my arms.”

His lingering anger faded as the tears finally fell. He hated that life, loathed how the curse of Sisyphus, the man who would never achieve fulfilment, burdened them both.

He stood, his eyes set on the floor, hoping for it to swallow him up. His ears rang, white noise echoing the emptiness he felt in her last moments. The same emptiness that burrowed itself deep inside of him, creating a void that didn't leave.

Tommy looked up into Wilbur's eyes, the brown in them reflecting the amber that was once in *hers*.

“Did that sober you up, dickhead?” his voice shook with his legs. “Bring the fucking laughter back, I dare you.”

Wrecked breaths left his chest as Wilbur stayed speechless and sombre.

Wilbur grabbed a blanket from his seat and draped it around Tommy's shoulders. “I need to show you something.”

Tommy let himself be led into the darkness of the streets, the adrenaline and hostility had abandoned him with the man who caused it all to arise. Instead, a hollow boy who lost all battles, even those he won, was in his place.

As they reached a gate, Wilbur's grip on him wavered. He kicked at the dented part of the metal and squeezed through the bars, forcing Tommy to do the same.

It didn't register in Tommy's head where they were as he absently followed him. They passed flower bushes, rows of benches, plaques in front of trees, weeds intertwined in the brick pathway. Though, the gravestones made it obvious.

Especially when they stopped in front of a grave which shared the same last name as Wilbur.

Unease fell to the pits of his stomach as the date engraved on the stone matched the current one today. It was the anniversary of her death.

Tommy tugged the blanket around his body.

Wilbur moved towards the bench, his hands clasped over each other and eyes focused on the metal plate of her carved name. It seemed they both knew what the loss of a mother was like.

It was silent in the graveyard, so silent that Tommy could hear the muffled cries that came from the bench. He stood still, staring at the man from a distance, the moon glistening above them.

"She got sick so quickly." Wilbur's bottom lip trembled as he spoke. "I got to say goodbye but it felt empty. Like the woman on that bed wasn't even *her*. She didn't even say it back."

Tommy sat beside him with his back straight as Wilbur crumbled into himself.

"Let it out," he whispered, wrapping half of the blanket around Wilbur. "Let it out, man."

And Wilbur did until there were no tears to be shed.

Brushing his hand along the other's back, Wilbur buried himself deeper into Tommy's side. His hold on him tightened as Wilbur shook.

"We're both fuckups, aren't we?" Tommy huffed humourlessly whilst Wilbur sat up.

"Seems like it," Wilbur croaked back. He sighed and shuffled closer to Tommy, relishing in his warmth. "I'm sorry."

Tommy rested his head on Wilbur's shoulder. "You were being a dickhead."

"A selfish dickhead who lashes out at the very same people who try to help him," Wilbur said.

"Add on that he's a twat as well, then it's you."

"Good addition." Wilbur sniffed and wiped his face. "I'll make it up to you. The shit I've put you through this week, I'll make up for it."

"You said that last time," Tommy mumbled, too tired to fight back. He closed his eyes as Wilbur rearranged his hold on him.

“I mean it, Toms.”

“You’re being awfully brotherly towards me,” was what Tommy said instead of unleashing the doubt swarming in his head.

“Don’t say that or I will cry.”

“You’ve done enough of that for today.”

A silence passed between them.

“She’d be proud of you,” Tommy said quietly as he stared at the gravestone. “And of your shit music.”

Wilbur’s mouth upturned. “You think so?”

“Hm. Was she a dog or cat person?”

“Cat.”

“Oh, she wouldn’t like your new music then.” Wilbur turned his head, confused. “*Stop, ‘cause why’d you have to kill my cat?*”

Wilbur burst out laughing, his chest vibrating against Tommy. The graveyard hummed, as if not used to such display of contentment.

“She loved music,” Wilbur murmured, a bittersweet smile on his lips. “That’s why I made my sixth form music piece about her. I regret it now since it’s something personal and- I don’t like having breakdowns in music rooms.”

“Is that what your album is?” Tommy asked. “‘Your City Gave Me Asthma’.”

“Pretty much,” Wilbur nodded, eyes dull. “I need to rewrite one of the songs soon, make it about something else.”

“Which one?”

“I have one called ‘My Mother Was Right’ but now... I don’t think having a song about *that* is good for me.”

Wilbur sighed and thread his fingers through Tommy’s hair.

“When she was sick, I visited her in that hospital. Dad told me not to, said I shouldn’t see her like that. But I went anyway.” Tommy leaned closer to him. “She would... she would speak a lot after her medicine kicked in, a lot of it made no sense but some of it did. And it was about me.”

“She was worried I would fuck myself up if she wasn’t here, that I would be my own downfall,” he laughed dryly. “After all that time, she was *right*.”

Tommy faced him. “What if you interpret it the other way? If you’re the only one to do that to yourself, then you can prevent it. Only you can help yourself.”

“How the fuck do I do that?” Wilbur whispered, tugging on the blanket.

“Therapy,” he said, biting his cheek as Wilbur scoffed at him. “It’s not a bad thing, Will. We can use Phil’s Tory money to get you a good one.”

Wilbur didn’t answer, his eyes unfocused. Tommy opened his mouth to argue but was interrupted.

“Only if you do it with me.”

“Fine,” Tommy replied with no hesitation. “If I have to talk about my shit to get you to do the same, then fine.”

Wilbur’s eyes watered and he reached forward, hugging Tommy harder than the last one. “Why couldn’t we have fostered you earlier?”

“Blame family vloggers,” Tommy said and he felt Wilbur smile into his chest.

“You ruined the moment.”

Tommy snorted. “Shut up, man.”

The two sat in the dark graveyard until the sun came up, exchanging quiet words and soft laughter as a burdened weight on both of their shoulders lifted.

Chapter 12

Tommy blamed Wilbur for all his problems, which for once, was accurate since it was Wilbur's fault for him returning home freezing his arse off with a scratch on his leg. Who the fuck forced a tired and emotionally burnt out child to jump over a massive garden fence at five o'clock in the morning? A selfish dickhead, that's who. (And yes, Tommy only called himself a child when it expedited pity points).

"Stop hitting me, you're the one who couldn't jump properly," Wilbur grumbled as Tommy whacked his shoulder for the sixteenth time.

"Die."

"You need to get more creative with your death threats," Wilbur said. "Try visiting TikTok comment sections."

"I will murder you and bury you with only one sock on."

"That's not the creativity I was looking for." Wilbur opened the glass door connected to the living room.

It was suspicious how the door was unlocked. But the major red flag was Techno sitting on the sofa reading a book in pure darkness with Phil asleep next to him.

"How the fuck are you reading that?" Tommy blurted out.

"I've memorised this book so I know when to change the page," Techno replied, his eyes still glued onto the book in his hands. Tommy was more concerned over how the book Techno chose to memorise was *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu.

Techno closed the book and drew their attention to Phil. "Who's gonna take the blame?"

Both Tommy and Wilbur pointed at each other and said at the same time, "Not me."

"You taking the blame is the first step of you making it up to me," Tommy declared, grinning as Wilbur pouted at him.

"Dad is going to beat me to death."

"Then you won't have to be in debt to me anymore."

"In debt?" Techno asked.

"He emotionally scarred me, these are the consequences," Tommy explained and patted Wilbur on the back, annoying the man further.

"Heh?"

“Don’t ‘heh?’ me dipshit. You’re in debt as well. You ditched our weekly fencing.”

Techno at least had the decency to look guilty about it.

“I want an apology and not another Greek mythology children’s book.”

“What about the adult version?” Techno huffed as Tommy narrowed his eyes at him.

“Alright, sorry. We can go fencing later after you sleep.”

“Good enough.”

“Now you guys are back, I’m going to bed. Good luck dealing with Phil, Wilbur.”

Techno picked up his book and left the living room. Wilbur hadn’t moved a muscle, his gaze stuck on Phil.

“I’m sleeping in your room tonight,” Wilbur said.

“Nope. I’ve had enough of Wilbur Craft for the rest of my life after today.”

“I will wake up dead.” Wilbur grabbed Tommy’s shoulder and shook them as he spoke. “Dad is going to skin me *alive*.”

“No therapy needed for you then,” Tommy shrugged, unbothered as Wilbur continued to shake him. “Goodnight.”

Wilbur groaned and flicked Tommy on the forehead. Then ran up the stairs as fast as he could—scared of the repercussions of his actions like a fucking pussy.

Yawning, Tommy looked around at the dark living room and turned off the muted TV. He gripped the blanket around his waist and draped it over Phil.

“Techno?” Phil said, groggily, waking up from his sleep. Tommy tensed. “Oh, you’re home safe.”

“Yeah, we’re back. We’re okay.” The man’s eyes began to shut again. Tommy finished tucking the blanket over him.

“Good.” It didn’t take long for Phil’s breathing to even out. Tommy watched him for a moment, a softness crawling throughout him. He felt guilty, for worrying the man to the point where he tried to stay awake downstairs hoping for Wilbur and him to return. But, Tommy was kinda pissed at him.

Still though, Phil cared about him.

Waking up at two o'clock in the afternoon was an acceptable time after having to chill in a graveyard until the 'aesthetic vibes' were ruined by the sun rising (those were Wilbur's words, not Tommy's). If sitting on a bench in front of your deceased mother's gravestone was an aesthetic, then he did not want to see Wilbur's Pinterest boards.

Cake for breakfast (or brunch) was acceptable as well, no conditions applied. The look of disgust Phil gave him as he worked from the second Tory kitchen table meant nothing to Tommy. He also ignored the exasperation Phil had as he sat with his plate of chocolate cake opposite him—on the table that you weren't supposed to eat on.

He had a couple of aims for how his brunch was going to go: firstly, he wanted to annoy the living hell out of Philza Minecraft—that was easy; secondly, he wanted an apology; and lastly, Tommy wanted to cheer the man up.

"You get no say in where I eat after how you treated me this entire week," Tommy said, digging his spoon into his cake. It was Wilbur's cake, but communism existed for a reason. "I get that this week and even now is hard for you, but you could have just told me instead of making me think that I was the problem."

Phil closed the lid of his laptop. "You're right, I should've. And I shouldn't have been distant with you either."

"You could've still been distant, Phil." Tommy waved his spoon around to emphasise his point. "If that's how you get through *that*, go for it. But next time, tell me beforehand."

"No, you don't deserve everyone ignoring you just because we're going through something, Tommy." Phil's kind eyes sharpened with solemnity. "I'm sorry for putting you through that."

Tommy shovelled another piece of cake into his mouth. As much as he aimed for an apology, it still made him uncomfortable. "When's our next Tesco's visit? I have more things to blackmail you with now."

"You are the devil reincarnated."

"I mean, I could be."

Tommy didn't know if there was a devil in Greek mythology. His first thought was Hades, but he was more the keeper of the dead, and Thanatos was the personification of death. But he did read one Quora post that argued how Prometheus, the Titan who pissed off Zeus and gave fire to humanity, was like Lucifer, with how they both rebelled against their God and tried to bring knowledge to humans.

Hm. Nah, he wasn't Prometheus. Though, the whole rebelling against Gods did sound like him. He resonated with the phrase that you should live a life that would get you burnt at the stake during Medieval times—which he was experienced with (Transylvania wasn't nice to Icarus).

"Is Wilbur dead?" Tommy asked, suddenly remembering the fear Wilbur felt earlier today.

“Wilbur is, unfortunately, alive,” Phil replied. “He agreed to take the punishment for the both of you, after removing ten years off my life expectancy due to stress.”

“Ten less years having to deal with Wilbur and Techno,” Tommy rebutted.

“Sounds like a dream,” Phil chuckled under his breath but then his expression hardened. “If you pull this shit again though, there will be no loopholes.”

“Understandable. I can’t wait to figure out what Beltza is like.”

“Oh my fucking God—” Phil facepalmed and rubbed at his eyes as if it was too early in the morning to deal with this (despite how it was the afternoon). “Stop listening to Wilbur. I don’t belt kids.”

Tommy laughed and shrugged at him as he got up from the table with his empty plate. It surprised him how much he missed conversations with Phil like this, where it ended with either Phil cussing him out or laughing with him. He was glad that insinuating that Phil belted children made the man feel better—anything to stop him from distancing himself again.

His brunch mission was successful, so now it was onto the plan he had with Techno. He didn’t quite know how this week affected Techno, it must’ve upset him if he wanted to be alone whilst fencing. Tommy fetched his school bag from his room before he knocked on Techno’s bedroom door. It was time to amuse (and annoy) the anime man.

“You aren’t even changed,” was what Techno said as he opened the door, already dressed in his sports gear.

“That’s because you’re helping me proofread my history coursework before we go,” Tommy answered, shoving the papers into Techno’s hands.

“And why would I do that?”

“You underestimate the power of guilt-tripping.”

Techno rolled his eyes and put on his glasses. He began to read it, though stopped after a minute. “Did you give me the right thing to read?”

“Yeah, why?”

“Your introduction starts with you talking shit about your history teacher.”

Tommy grinned. Slandering Miss Allingham was just something that came so easily to him. “She said the coursework had to come from the heart. This is my heart.”

“You called her a ‘Disney adult’ when summarising your argument about what factor was most significant in causing the L’Manberg Revolution,” Techno said, his voice stoic though there was an inkling of an amused smile on his lips.

He continued reading, his smile becoming more prominent as he did so.

“I don’t think it’s appropriate to say, ‘King George was uckers and deserved to die’ in a paragraph that’s supposed to argue about the corruption of the Essempi monarchy,” Techno said, crossing out the words on the paper with a red pen.

“Am I wrong though?”

Techno rolled his eyes again.

“Tommy, you can’t include hashtags in your essay.”

“Why not?”

“You even put them in your references!”

Tommy didn’t really care about history and he held a grudge against the teacher, so why would he be formal and professional in any written work? His plan seemed to be as successful though, as Techno looked both entertained and disgusted at his work.

“Do you at least agree with my conclusion?” Tommy asked.

“Actually, yes,” Techno said. “The question is, as you said, ‘dumb, biased, stupid, and dumb again’. The structuring your teacher made you do is weird as well.”

“Technoblade, be my history teacher.”

“No.” Techno handed him his coursework back, his mood lighter than before. “Get changed, we’re leaving in five minutes.”

When they arrived at the fencing building and the training started, it seemed like the guilt Techno felt earlier for ignoring Tommy throughout the week went away. It was obvious due to how Techno was absolutely destroying the fuck out of Tommy and littering his body with bruises. Not only was his ego wounded, but everything else Techno could technically reach was as well.

“This is rigged. I am at a disadvantage,” Tommy fumed as he rubbed the aches on his chest.

“Then do better,” Techno said, smug.

Russ interrupted Tommy’s train of thought (which was just many, many insults about Techno) by counting them in again.

Within seconds, Techno flung himself over the centre line and sliced his blade across Tommy’s already bruised shoulder before his feet touched the floor.

“I swear to fucking God—”

“A minute break,” Russ announced over Tommy’s complaining.

It took everything in Tommy to not strangle the bitch to the floor as Techno dared to look proud of himself. He sighed and contained his anger.

“You know any therapists around here?” Tommy asked, not knowing what else to say during their break.

“That is not a conversation starter I expected.”

“I got Wilbur to agree to therapy if I do it as well,” he further explained.

Techno scowled at him. “How?”

“I have my ways.” Techno hit him with his sabre, shrugging off the penalty Russ gave him for attacking during a break. “Fine! Jesus. I have my problems, he has his. We’ve agreed to both try to deal with them via therapy.”

“He told you, didn’t he?” Tommy frowned. “About his mother.”

“Yeah.”

Techno walked forward and Tommy kept his eyes on the blade in the other’s hand.

“Don’t break his trust,” Techno muttered, it sounding like a threat. He bit on his lip and continued, “And don’t let him break yours either.”

He saluted. “Yes, sir!”

“Stop giving me more reason to stab you.” Tommy gasped at him.

“Break’s over,” Russ said.

Techno immediately aimed for Tommy’s throat, so the reasonable and highly illegal move Tommy chose to make was to tackle the man to the ground.

“Corps-a-corps, penalty,” Russ called, glaring at Tommy.

“Russ, he threatened me!” Tommy shouted, sitting on Techno’s legs so the man couldn’t get up.

“You still can’t touch him.”

Tommy groaned and hoisted himself up, leaving a disgruntled Techno still on the floor. “Get up, pussy.”

“You are the sole reason why children deserve less,” Techno grumbled.

After being humiliated by the same man whose name printed on their birth certificate was literally ‘Technoblade’, Tommy decided to bother Niki more. She had sent him her work

schedule and he abused this as much as he could—especially when she was the one closing the café.

“You’ve been staring at your phone like it personally offended you for half an hour,” Niki said as she placed plates into the dishwasher.

“Because it has!” Tommy shouted, tempted to throw his phone into the freezer and leave it there. “Why is therapy so expensive?”

“Let me guess, you’re on the Las Nevadas website.”

Tommy exited the site, glaring at it. “Yeah.”

“That therapy industry specialises in dealing with addiction. It’s a rehab centre, so it’s going to be expensive,” Niki explained.

“Wait, how do you know that?”

“I tried to sign Tubbo up to it when I was fifteen because he was annoying me.”

“Did it work?” Tommy asked and Niki gave him a look. “Y’know, you could just tell me when I ask a stupid question instead of judging me.”

“Where’s the fun in that?” she laughed as Tommy flipped her off.

Niki closed the dishwasher and turned on one of the sink taps to wash the rest of the cutlery. She let out a loud shriek as boiling water burned her right hand. Tommy jumped from the counter and grabbed a cloth. He turned on the cold water and held her right wrist under it, trying to ease her burn.

“Are you that incompetent?” he joked.

“I get the hot and cold taps mixed up,” Niki defended, whilst laughing at her own stupidity.

Minutes passed and the redness on her hand seemed to simmer. Tommy went to let go of her but the black ink smeared on her inner wrist caught his attention. He rubbed at it with the cloth before Niki reared her hand back.

Even with Niki attempting to cover her arm, Tommy could recognise the mark of Zagreus from anywhere, seeing as the same tattoo burdened his wrist too.

“Niki?” he gaped at her, a plethora of emotions flowing through him, ranging from amazement to relief. “You’re- you’re like me. He wasn’t lying, holy shit, he wasn’t lying.”

“Tommy—” Niki didn’t share his elation.

“I’m not alone, oh my God, you’re...” he smiled. He had someone like *him*, someone who understood the pain of reincarnation and built-up frustration at having no free will over the events in your life. “How many lives have you lived?”

“Tommy,” Niki’s clipped tone caught him off guard. She looked up at him, unease practically flying off her. “Do you not remember me?”

He stared at her with startled eyes, confused. He tried to remember every face from every life, though they were all mushed together over time. She untucked her necklace from under her collar and the blood drained from Tommy’s face. The same charms his brother had crafted everyone before their declaration of independence hung around Niki’s neck, their token of togetherness and brotherhood.

“Nihachu.”

The scars of Theseus across his back flared as he pushed himself away from her. He could almost picture a younger version of her, the girl he loved like a big sister, who sowed patches onto the rips of his uniform and bandaged his wounds. Too bad her concern over his health had died by the time he actually needed it—when cuts from enemy swords meant *nothing* compared to the damage Dream did to him.

“You abandoned me,” Tommy whispered, his throat constricted. “You... you let me die in exile.”

Loneliness followed him in every life, but he could never forget its origin. Her betrayal hadn’t hurt as much as the other’s did, partly because by the time it hit, he was counting down the days for *everyone* to follow in his brother’s footsteps, to leave him.

Niki’s face furrowed with pain. “I was mourning your brother—”

“So was I!” he cried out, voice harsh. “So was I.”

“You abandoned me too. You all did!” Niki tugged on her necklace. “And my myth practically confirmed it.”

He swallowed down his objection.

“I was Calypso. Every person I fell in love with ended up leaving me, just because I decided to follow you and your brother over the King. My own family begged me not to join the Revolution but I did anyway. Through war and death, you both left me,” she scoffed, tears present in her eyes as Tommy sank deeper against the wall. “I wasn’t your priority, I was *nothing*.”

“The last time I saw you, you were shouting at me during my trial, siding with *them* to punish me, even if it meant exile,” he bit back, anger gritting at his teeth. “I was manipulated, tortured and killed, and you just let that happen.”

Niki winced at the fight in his voice. He had longed for confrontation ever since his first death and she unlocked a part of himself that he had buried as he was certain he could never achieve it. She knew what happened after his exile, she knew what happened to his father, how the wars ended.

“Who else is cursed?” he demanded, his head pounding.

His entire world had flipped in a matter of minutes, unanswered questions at the root of all his problems; he thought he was alone, but now he wasn't, yet the only person who understood what it was like to be cursed was *her*. Someone he thought was his friend, two times now in different lives.

"I only know of those who were with me whilst I waited to be reborn."

Tommy paused. His mouth dried as her words registered. "You had other people in your void?"

Niki hesitated to nod.

"Who?" he asked, more aggressive than the last. "Who was with you?"

"Tommy—"

"Who the fuck was with you?"

"Your brother stayed the longest," Niki whimpered as if it hurt her throat to say. "Tommy, were... were you alone all that time?"

Tommy flinched back, the black emptiness that accompanied his dreams swallowing him whole. Niki had his brother in her void. Would it even be a void for her? She wasn't trapped in years of solitude, she had *him* and that was all Tommy ever desired.

"What about Dream?" he asked, more frantic. "Was he there?"

"Who's Dream?"

His breath hitched. She wasn't haunted by a masked man who laughed at the pain *he* caused and whispered comfort when it all got too much. She didn't know the torture of being forced to converse with the very same God who ripped and ruined your youth, the one responsible for every scar on his body and mind.

"Look, Tommy, I'm—"

"I need to go," he said, out of breath. He ran out of the building, the cold air suffocating his lungs as the thousands of realisations came upon him.

He sat on his bed and traced over his brother's handwriting in his notebook with the sickness worsening in his stomach.

Niki, someone he called a friend, knew who he was this entire time and didn't tell him. She didn't even know who Dream was. On top of it all, she was over sixteen, so she had guessed

her myth correctly already. Niki was free, not burdened by the guilt that wormed into Tommy's heart after he wasted another day without getting closer to knowing who his myth was.

Jealousy stopped him from being able to sleep. Someone with the same curse had a happy ending, but where did that leave him? Alone, scarred and fucked up. He didn't have a family, a purpose in life, or confidence in himself.

His tattoo burned, meaning that Dream *knew* a visit was inevitable, yet every time he closed his eyes, the same brown shade of his brother's stared back at him.

He never said goodbye to his brother, or even got an explanation for why he changed ever since their first banishment to Pogtopia. The unknown reasons as to why his big brother, who once comforted him when he had nightmares, became the man who caused them.

Tears pricked in his eyes out of frustration.

He rushed downstairs into the kitchen, ignoring Techno and Phil, who were watching the TV. His hands shook as he reached into the highest cabinet and retrieved a box. He held the pharmaceutical box with Wilbur's name on it and bit his inner cheek. Amitriptyline was also a medication for insomnia and Tommy couldn't die from an overdose—it was still a stupid idea though. But he *needed* to sleep. He needed answers that only Dream could give.

"Tommy, you alright in there?" Phil called from the living room. He opened the box and stuffed a strip of the tablets into his pocket.

"Yeah, just needed a drink!" he said back, hoping that the quiver in his voice wasn't obvious. He put the box back into the cabinet and got a water bottle from the fridge.

He muttered a goodnight to the two and walked back upstairs, the weight in his pocket fuelling the anxiety clawing at his chest.

His tattoo pricked at his skin, almost warning him not to, but he never did listen to Dream's advice. Before he could convince himself not to, he unwrapped the tablets and swallowed them dry. The four empty vessels in the strip glared back at him. He probably should've researched the maximum dose for amitriptyline before shoving two hundred milligrams of it down his throat. His curse didn't make him immune to side effects.

Tommy laid on his back, burrowing himself under his covers and clinging onto Henry. The hat Niki had knitted for him was still on Henry's head. Why would she do that? Why would she go along with being his friend, even as far as to give him a Christmas present, if he had abandoned her too?

It wasn't his intention to isolate himself from those he loved during the peace periods between wars, Niki included. But having your brother be brutally murdered by your father and Tobias caring more about saving an already dead nation over his own best friend ruined the idea of love for Tommy.

He raised his arm to rub at his eyes, only for him not to feel the contact. He tried to sit up, but his body weighed him back down. His skin tingled, drowsiness overwhelming him as his eyes kept fluttering shut.

Tommy pried his eyes open, yet he wasn't in his bedroom anymore.

Grey walls adorned with red vines surrounded him. He was in the maze again, in the void.

Fed up with playing into any more of Dream's games, he ran forward, holding onto the walls as he navigated himself through.

"Dream!" he yelled, his limbs dragged him down as he reached another dead end. "Dream, you fucking coward, come out!"

He shouted until his throat was hoarse.

Dream appeared in front of him, drops of blood stained against his mask and green cloak.

"You have questions I can't answer, Tommy," Dream said, his mouth thinned into a line.

Tommy threw his fist forward, but it phased straight through the God and smashed against the maze wall.

He held his hand to his chest. "Why the fuck didn't you tell me my brother and Niki are cursed?"

Dream didn't entertain his questions.

"You fucking bitch. I was alone all this time when I could've been with them!" he rested against the wall, his body defeated. "Why am I different?"

Dream stepped forward and towered over him. "You're special." His mask glistened.

"How?" he spat, anger seething on his tongue.

"You're special to me."

Tommy tried to hit him and his knuckles scratched against the wall, bleeding gold instead of red.

"Stop hurting yourself," Dream ordered. Tommy did it again, over and over until he collapsed onto the cold floor.

Tommy sniffed, the exhaustion and pain catching up to him.

"How do I know you're even real?" his bleary eyes tried to remain open. "Nihachu didn't know who you were."

"I'm real, Tommy." Dream's hand cupped his cheek, the gentle grip conflicting him. "I'll tell you more in time."

“I don’t *have* time!”

Dream’s hold on him tightened, his fingers grazing past his chin as Tommy’s eyes closed.
“Then pay attention.”

The touch disappeared and Tommy’s back resigned against the wall. He didn’t need to open his eyes to know Dream had left him in the void. Alone again.

Chapter 13

All Tommy wanted to do was eat his cereal upstairs in peace. He woke up literally dying, but without the permanence of death—his curse made it that overdosing didn't kill him but it sure did hurt. He could barely feel his pulse, he breathed like one of those inbred pugs with respiratory problems and his body felt like he was in Antarctica with Techno's polar bear Steve. Speaking of Techno, the fucker wouldn't leave him alone.

"Techno, please, let me eat my Coco Pops," Tommy whined as he sat on the edge of his bed with the bowl in his hands. Techno scowled at him from the door frame and shook his head. "Dude, what did I do?"

"You know what you did."

"If this is about me lying to you like literal months ago when I said that Will ate the last of your waffles, I'm not sorry and I'd do it again."

"Oh I already knew about that, I just wanted an excuse to beat up Wilbur." Techno crossed his arms and succeeded in coming across as threatening as possible. "But, this is about him."

Tommy frowned. For once in his life, he wasn't admiring the ominous aura Techno had, because frankly, the man was confusing the fuck out of him.

"Remember to put the printed paper that tells you about the medication and side effects back into the box next time you steal Wilbur's meds," Techno said.

Oh fuck.

"I have no idea what you're talking about," Tommy replied, twitching under the harsh glare of Techno.

"Look, I don't want to go through the stages of grief with you."

"What?" Tommy said as Techno rolled his eyes.

"You make it so easy to bully you. You're in denial. I know you took his meds." Techno stepped closer into his room. "I monitor whether Wilbur takes his medication, he's not subtle either with flushing it half the time, and one of the strips is missing from the kitchen."

"Is big brother Technoblade gonna kill me?" Tommy knew that taunting the man who could currently blackmail him to death wasn't the smartest choice, but he did it anyway.

"No, but I can tell Phil and—"

"Don't!" he shouted, straining his throat. "I just needed to sleep, okay? I won't do it again."

"Good." Techno walked back into the corridor, satisfied. "Now come downstairs, you're ruining breakfast."

“I would’ve never thought you’d be the sworn protector of family breakfast.”

“I am one yell away from notifying everyone in this household that you stole drugs.”

Tommy flipped him off but did, very reluctantly, follow Techno downstairs with his cereal bowl.

The next day at school, Tommy travelled from his English class to the bench uncomfortable. Maybe it was because Clementine had been off sick today so having to deal with analysing Macbeth wasn’t as entertaining as it usually was. Or perhaps it was because the side effects of shoving two hundred milligrams of an unprescribed antidepressant into your system just to harass a God still hadn’t left his system. But Tommy knew the true reason: he was terrified of what would happen after school. Phil had found a therapist for both him and Wilbur, arranging for different people but the sessions would occur at the same time in the same building. And he was *slightly* regretting agreeing to it all.

He sat down on the bench, not partaking in Tubbo and Ranboo’s avid conversation about the dreams Tubbo had about Soviet Russian human experiments. Though, the mention of his name did scare him.

“Tommy, I just said that you were one of the doctors who forced a syringe of radioactive substances into my neck and you haven’t even reacted.”

He blinked, staring wide at the pair. “What in the actual fuck—”

“Okay, I’ve got your attention now. What’s up?” Tubbo asked, resting his hand under his chin as if he hadn’t just said the weirdest shit Tommy had ever heard.

“You could’ve done *anything else* to get my attention and not be gruesome.”

Both Tubbo and Ranboo stayed silent, and Tommy groaned, knowing they wouldn’t say anything until he answered.

“Guess who has therapy after school.”

“Would I be correct to say you?” Ranboo said.

“Yep.”

“What’s my prize for guessing it right?”

“A hug.”

“Really?”

“Fuck no.”

Tommy laughed as Ranboo crossed his arms as exaggeratedly as possible since his mask and sunglasses covered his anger.

“Don’t worry, you’ll ace this,” Tubbo encouraged.

“I’ll ace therapy?”

“Dude, I don’t know, but I had to say something.”

Ranboo put his hand over Tubbo’s mouth. “Just take it easy and don’t feel like you’re obligated to share anything you don’t want to, especially on the first session. They’re there for you.”

“You are finally proving your use to me,” Tommy said.

“How do you turn everything nice I do for you into an insult?”

“That’s not my problem.”

“It’s a problem you cause!”

Tubbo bit Ranboo’s hand until he took it off his mouth. “But yeah, you’ve got this boss man. You can come round mine after if it goes badly. Wii bowling is a great way to get out anger.”

“Or cause anger,” Ranboo added, holding his gloved hand that had been assaulted by Tubbo’s teeth close to his chest.

“Nah, I have an agreement with Will to hang out with him after, but thanks anyway.”

“Now that’s over, can I go back to explaining my Russian dreams now?”

“No!” both Ranboo and Tommy yelled.

It seemed that Wilbur was even more nervous for therapy, with how the man hadn’t said a word since they got in the car to drive to the place. He also completely froze when the receptionist asked for their appointment, which pretty much confirmed that Wilbur did not want to be here.

“We’re Wilbur Craft and Tommy Idelle for the appointments at three-thirty,” Tommy said over the counter, pulling Wilbur to his side before he could get the chance to run out the building. If it were any other circumstances, Tommy would’ve made fun of Wilbur for

crumbling at a balding middle-aged man who looked like he wasn't paid enough to do deal with this.

They were given directions to floor three, where both their different therapists were located. Tommy had an iron grip on Wilbur's arm as he tugged him in the elevator lift. The music that sounded like one of those 'study with me Lo-fi beats' did not help.

"You can back out after if you think your therapist is shit, but you have to do this session," Tommy declared, loosening his grip as they reached their floor.

"I can't believe I'm being pushed around by a child," Wilbur grumbled.

"This *child* is walking you to your therapist's door, you ungrateful bitch." Tommy pushed him in front of the door and knocked for him. "I'll meet you in the reception after. I hope you cry."

Wilbur flicked his forehead. "Go cry over your own trauma first, dickhead."

"Will do!" Tommy called as he knocked on his therapist's door.

A short woman with split-dyed brown and white hair opened the door. She had a spirited smile and open eyes that radiated warmth and safety, though her red blazer and white vest did throw him off—she looked like a sailor.

He entered the room and sat down on the chair facing the desk which had a plaque on it named 'Captain Puffy', only the captain part was written on a piece of paper and stuck over what it said prior.

"Would you like a drink before we introduce ourselves?" the woman asked. Of course his therapist was American. Why can he never catch a break?

She gestured towards the minifridge next to her desk and Tommy took a can of Coke out of it.

"Right then, I'm Dr Puffy, but you can just call me Puffy, and I've been assigned for you," Puffy said, opening her can of Green Monster (what kind of therapist drunk that shit whilst on the job?). "I'm more of a conversational therapist, so think of it as floor one of a video game."

She stopped talking and Tommy narrowed his eyes at her. She hadn't even taken a sip of her drink, yet she acted as if she had downed it already with how much energy she exhibited.

"I'm Tommy," he said, not sure what else to say. "Hi."

Her smile changed into a more welcoming one, but her eyes stayed the same. "Hi, would you like to tell me why you booked a therapist here?"

"I have an agreement with my foster brother. I'm only here so he does therapy as well," it was partly a lie but Tommy didn't see anything wrong with lying to her (despite how she was there to *help* him, so maybe that was a dumb move).

“Well, that’s quite nice of you to support your foster brother like that. How long have you been housed with him?”

“I got there at the beginning of November.”

“Ah, so three months.” Tommy nodded, a chill ran down his neck as he hadn’t realised how long he’d been living there. “Even though you are here because of your foster brother, you can still use our services. Anyone can have therapy, no matter the state of their mental health.”

Now, Tommy knew he didn’t have the perfect mental health a person his age should—well technically, for someone born in 1509, he should be dead—but his problems weren’t *that* bad. Maybe he should discuss with Puffy his tendency to lie to himself as well. Though, he went with blurting out the words on the top of his head instead.

“Why’d you look like a sailor?”

Puffy straightened her blazer. “I’ve been told I dress before my time so I just embrace it. Sure, it is a bit unprofessional in this setting, but I think it adds character.”

“I like it.”

“Thank you, my boss would disagree though.”

“Fuck them,” she laughed as Tommy’s face reddened. “Wait, not like that, I mean, screw them. No, like—”

“I know what you mean, don’t worry.” She continued to laugh until Tommy had drunk his entire Coke can to avoid further embarrassment.

“Nothing I say leaves this room, right? And you can’t judge me?” he asked after the small silence.

At Puffy’s confirmation, Tommy was tempted to just bust out with an entire monologue about his problems centred around cyclical reincarnation, confusing myths and Gods who wouldn’t leave him the fuck alone. But he didn’t want to be misdiagnosed with a mental disorder, which would happen if he told the absolute truth.

“I’m a foster kid,” was what he said instead. “Are you going to psychoanalyse me for saying that?”

“I’m not one to psychoanalyse, especially without someone’s consent. I can only make inferences, but if I did make any from just that, it would be an ignorant generalisation.”

“Is that the special way of saying, it’s inappropriate for me to do that but I’ll kinda do it anyway?”

Puffy leaned forward. “Do you want me to?”

He bit on his cheek. He always thrived with bouncing off people who had no backbone or initiative to be blunt. But Puffy seemed to match his energy.

“Do it,” he challenged before he could regret it. “Be as brutal as possible.”

Puffy stood up and gestured for him to do the same. He straightened his posture and tried to act as normal as possible, but as she walked closer and circled around him, he tensed. Her eyebrows furrowed and her jaw clenched with concentration. Tommy gulped, not expecting such a scrutinising gaze from a therapist, yet he did kinda ask for it, and according to Reddit, people who had psychology degrees were judgemental as fuck. (But since when was Reddit a credible source?).

She faced him again and sat back down. “Do you want the good or bad news first?”

“Bad news.”

Puffy grinned. “Bad news: I’m not trained to psychoanalyse people.”

“So you just made me stand up for nothing?” Tommy gaped at her.

“Not for nothing, but maybe for my own entertainment.” He stifled a laugh. “But the good news, from my untrained perspective, I think you’re a nice kid since you’re doing this for your foster brother. You might have some unsolved issues with how you wanted me to think badly of you and feed into the stereotype already placed on you by your fostering agency.”

Ignoring her complimenting him, he agreed with her. “Linda Smith is the spawn of Satan.”

“Your social worker, I presume?” Tommy nodded.

“She attached labels to me before I even met her,” he scoffed. “A problem child, a pathological liar who looks for trouble and fights.”

“Well, without meeting her, I think the label of the spawn of Satan fits her pretty well,” Puffy said and Tommy smiled. “Do you want to talk more about your experience with foster care?”

He liked having the option of whether he wanted to talk about it or not. Having a choice and free will was rare to someone whose life was predestined and out of their control. There was probably a loophole in bringing up his curse to talk about without the fear of being put in an asylum.

“I’ve been placed in many homes, some lasting just for a week and others for months. The most important ones I’ve assigned names to. Well, they’re more Greek myths. My first house is Theseus, then Icarus, Orpheus, and Sisyphus,” he eventually said, bullshitting on the spot.

Puffy seemed interested. “What inspired the names?”

“They resemble the lessons I’ve learnt with each house.”

“Oh, so with your second home, with Icarus, you learnt to either control your ambition or listen to your elders?”

If being ambitious and careless meant attempting to overthrow a village cult in 15th century Transylvania, then yes, Puffy was correct. He should've listened to the elderly women in his village as well when they told him *not* to set fire to the Church. Icarus was a life he preferred not to think about, for his sanity's sake.

"Yeah and with Theseus, I learnt not to trust green men or I'll be stabbed in the stomach and pushed off a cliff." Puffy blinked at him, stumped. "Metaphorically, of course."

"Of course, I wouldn't think a green Teletubby would push you off a cliff anyway." Tommy chuckled at her words, Dream did remind him of a Teletubby. "Uh, what about Orpheus?"

"Smallpox was a dangerous disease," Tommy explained, referring to Deo's death, his Eurydice.

He would be lying if Puffy's rising confusion didn't amuse him. "And Sisyphus?"

Tommy's amusement dropped. He couldn't joke about that.

"I learnt that... that no matter how hard I try, I will never achieve what I want. It will always be out of reach."

"Oh," Puffy mumbled. "I'm guessing this house meant the most to you, whether that's negatively or positively."

"It had the most recent impact, yeah. I've got mental baggage now, or whatever that means. Wilbur said it once in a song."

"What about your current placement? Do you have a myth for this one yet?" Puffy asked.

"No. No, that's what I need to figure out before it's too late."

"Too late?"

Tommy glanced down at his right arm, despite how he had long sleeves, the stain on his wrist never left his mind. He could almost feel his upcoming birthday in April get closer and closer just by thinking about his tattoo.

"I end up ruining good things, this included," he muttered.

"How so?"

In every life, no matter how attached he was to it, he always ended up alone. It didn't even matter if it was his fault at this point because the first thing he saw after each death was a masked man there to remind him of his failure. Dream loved to rub it in that Tommy could never guess his myth correctly.

"I feel like I'm cursed, it's inevitable for it to end badly," he winced as his tattoo stung from under his sleeve. "I don't want to talk about this anymore."

"That's fine. We can talk about something else," Puffy said, her smile reassuring him.

He hesitated to answer. Maybe he could ask about what he should do with Niki, but he'd rather not get into that just yet, especially on the first session.

So instead he asked, "Have you seen the movie 'Moana'?"

It was obvious to say that this therapy session ended on a weird note.

The same nerves Tommy had when entering the building had disappeared as he waited in the reception for Wilbur's session to finish. Though, the anxiety returned at the sight of Wilbur, who had bloodshot eyes and a red nose. Obviously, Wilbur did not discuss Dwyane The Rock Johnson (yes that was his full name to Tommy) and the logistics of 'Moana' with his therapist.

"Will? You alright?" Tommy asked, softly, as Wilbur stopped in front of the lounge chairs.

"It seems I may have underestimated the number of issues I've been bottling up."

"You fucking think?" Tommy couldn't stop himself to say, gesturing to the tear tracks down Wilbur's face. Wilbur snorted and retrieved the used tissue from his pocket to wipe his eyes. "You good, though?"

"Let's go get something to eat." Wilbur walked out of the reception.

"That doesn't answer my question!" Tommy said as he rushed to follow him into the carpark.

After another silent car ride, the two entered the local café—Tommy was glad that Niki wasn't working today, he couldn't handle seeing her right now. They sat at his normal table by the back.

4/3: Family Chat

Phil: How did therapy go?

Tommy: Dr Pussy is cool

PUSFY*

PUFFY**

SORRY AUTOCORRECT

Technoblade: ...

Tommy: shut the fuck up

Phil: We'll talk more about this more when you get home.

Tommy looked up from his phone, face flushed with embarrassment, and blinked at the waiter Wilbur was talking to. He ordered a side of chips and frowned at Wilbur after the waiter left.

“So was your therapist nice—?”

“I’m not talking about this right now,” Wilbur interrupted and wrapped his coat tighter around him.

“Fine, fine, I’m just saying, you’d be jealous of the one I have,” Tommy said. “Do you think this has potential though?”

Wilbur rolled his eyes but answered anyway. “Eventually, I think it’ll help. I just don’t react well to people pointing out all the flaws in my thinking process.”

“Did you punch them?”

“I’m not listening to you anymore.”

Wilbur grabbed his AirPods from his pocket. Tommy glared at him until Wilbur tossed him one of the earbuds. Yet, he regretted it when Wilbur put on a song.

“What the fuck is this emo shit? Wilbur, I am not listening to your angst edit audios playlist after a fucking *therapy* session.”

“You put on something then.”

Tommy snatched the phone off him and grinned when Wilbur groaned at the song he chose.

“You have a problem with ‘Mr. Brightside’, bitch?”

Wilbur slammed his head on the table.

“Listening to sad songs will make it worse,” Tommy said, ruffling the man’s hair to irritate him more.

“So ‘The Killers’ will make it better?”

“Is it working?”

Wilbur raised his head from the table and scowled. “You are so annoying.”

Tommy smiled widely. “It’s working.”

Chapter 14

Now, Tommy had many enemies but he would never wish upon them having to sit through two hours of English class with Miss King. Most of his enemies were dead yet his point still stands. His teacher peaked in her twenties when she had a youthful face, a role in the theatres and hadn't developed a nicotine addiction yet.

The only part of his English lessons he enjoyed was the running commentary he got from the person to his left. Clementine, a girl with dark tanned skin and pink butterfly clips in her brown hair, practically carried the class. If Miss asked a question and no one answered, she'd just volunteer the most random shit—she once compared Romeo and Juliet to 'Twilight' (she did make good points though).

But the way Miss King droned on about a specific poem even drained Clementine, who kept drawing flowers Tommy's clear pencil case rather than paying attention to the teacher's unanswered questions.

When she had finished her drawing, he gathered up enough confidence to bother her.

"Clem, you know girls, right?" he asked, not too sure on how to start this conversation. The whole issue with Niki had been irritating him this entire week and he didn't know what to do.

"Well, I am one, so yes. Why?" she said as she closed the cap of her pen.

Tommy leaned closer to her. "Okay, this is hypothetical and does not apply to me. So, a girl, who's like a big sister to this person, betrayed them years ago but now it seems like she's sorry and has changed. Should I- should *they* just get over it or...?"

"What did this girl do to betray you?" Clementine asked, smiling widely when Tommy frowned.

"I didn't say this was about me."

"Tommy, you do not have a subtle bone in your body," she said. "Answer the question."

He glared and she returned the look, only a thousand times harsher until he answered, "She basically left me when I was in a bad place mentally."

"Oh." Clementine's glare softened. "I wasn't expecting that. How has she showed she's sorry or has changed?"

Tommy bit on his cheek as he recalled his conversation with Niki—it was something he tried to forget ever since the following Dream visit.

"She hasn't apologised, but she's dyed her hair."

“I was aiming for changes like emotional maturation or improvement, rather than long-term hair damage,” Clementine said.

Tommy shrugged and she rolled her eyes.

“In my opinion, you should first focus on healing or whatever from the betrayal and bad place you were in. Then, it’s a matter of her apologising and whether you choose to forgive her or not,” she explained, not caring the teacher was openly staring at the two of them talking.

“What if this betrayal is deeply rooted trauma and not something I could get over in time?”

“Get drunk or get a therapist, I don’t know,” she muttered as Tommy sighed. “Don’t look at me like that, you came to *me* for advice.”

Tommy banged his head on the table. “Ugh, thanks anyway.”

“Now that’s over, help me analyse this poem.”

“Clem, Ozymandias isn’t that deep, you don’t need to analyse it again.”

“Say that again, I dare you,” she threatened, holding her pen fiercely as if she was about to shank him.

“Fucking hell, fine, I’ll help.”

She grinned and handed him her green highlighter.

He didn’t expect to see Techno at the wheel of Wilbur’s car when he reached the carpark after school had finished.

Tommy opened the door and scowled at Wilbur, who was in *his* seat at the front. “I usually sit there.”

“Cope,” Wilbur replied. He flicked Wilbur on the forehead before getting into the back of the car.

“Why is Techno here, anyway?” Tommy asked as Techno began driving. He did appreciate how Techno was more careful with driving since Wilbur normally sped out of the school main road and tried to run over the year nine’s who didn’t look before crossing.

“MCC is soon. You need training,” Techno said.

“What the fuck is MCC?”

“It’s the school’s sports day. Technoblade here takes it very seriously despite not even being a student anymore,” Wilbur answered, patting Techno on the shoulder as he spoke.

Tommy wouldn’t have thought that Techno would be *this* invested in sport’s day, especially for a twenty-year-old man with a fully paying job. But Techno was competitive.

“Why do we need training?”

“Because you need to win,” Techno said with too much emotion needed for a fucking sport’s day tournament.

“This is sad man, you’re living vicariously through a fifteen-year-old.”

“Do you want an MCC coin or not?”

“A coin? Does it look cool?” Tommy asked and Techno nodded. “Fine, what training?”

“I’ll show you PowerPoints in how to get the fastest times in some of the games, but for now, we’re building up your stamina.”

“You fucking nerd. PowerPoints?”

“Don’t mock this, he’s the reason why I got an MCC coin,” Wilbur defended.

Techno parked near the football field and threw sports gear at both of them when they exited the car. “Get changed in the bathrooms and prepare yourselves for a five-mile run.”

“Are you trying to kill me?”

“No, he’s trying to kill *us*,” Wilbur corrected as he unfolded the clothes in his arms.

Techno didn’t deny their words and pointed at the public bathrooms, too smug for his own good. Tommy groaned and followed Wilbur, knowing that his lungs were about to be abused—it wasn’t his fault that he was slightly below average with his athleticism.

The torture lasted hours and if you asked Tommy, he was *not* being a little bitch for sulking in the front seat of the car on their way back home. At every red light, Wilbur did another mocking action whilst he called Tommy a ‘little baby man’ and Techno laughed from the backseat.

The exercise Techno forced him to do would have killed him if he didn’t have slight immortality; he had never run so much in his life (and he had been through many wars). Halfway through their run, Techno decided to heckle them from the stands and cheered whenever Wilbur tripped Tommy over.

“I hope you crash this car. My body could not be more damaged than it already is,” Tommy retorted as he rubbed the mud off his knees.

Techno kicked the back of his seat. “You’re exaggerating.”

“Yeah, stop complaining,” Wilbur said and reached over to ruffle his hair.

“Dude, focus on the fucking road unless you actually want to crash the car!” Tommy shouted.

“I’ll have you know, I haven’t hit anyone.”

“Yet.”

“Shut up, I’m gonna be one teaching you how to drive,” Wilbur said, grinning at the fear on Tommy’s face.

“He has no chance of passing then,” Techno added, making Tommy laugh.

He would rather have driving lessons from Techno than Wilbur when he turns seventeen—

His throat choked up and his stomach dropped. He’d never been seventeen before.

He never will be unless he figured out his myth. It was February and he had until April. Fucking April.

All the unleashed tears he stifled at nights where his hands ached from writing in that stupid notebook caught up to him. Who was he kidding at this point? His attempts at researching his myth were futile. Pointless endeavours to cling to the family he always dreamed for and couldn’t keep when they were finally here.

He hated how he wasn’t born into this family, didn’t have hundreds of more memories of car trips with Wilbur and Techno—he would’ve had more than six months with them and that was all he ever wanted. He would’ve grown old with them, one day become better than Techno at fencing, learn how to drive from Wilbur and maybe even be there when he became a musician and performed his heart out on stage. He wanted to be Phil’s son, his actual son. Tommy would do *anything* just to wake up every morning and not be scared that this might be the last he has with *them*.

He didn’t realise he was crying until Wilbur parked into their driveway.

“Tommy, you coming?” Techno asked as he exited the car.

“Toms?” Wilbur said, softer.

He rubbed harshly at his face and opened the door.

“I’m gonna go round Tubbo’s house,” he murmured before walking away, ignoring Wilbur calling out for him to come back.

The tightness in his chest amplified as he rushed down the street, his vision blurred from the tears. He didn’t expect the reminder that he’d never reach seventeen and enjoy those moments to hit him so hard. Hiccups broke Tommy’s attempts to breathe as sobs reaped from his heart.

Tubster:

Tommy: tubbo open your door before I kick it down.

please I need your help

Tubbo: coming

He tried to control his breathing as he waited, gripping his arms around himself to stay grounded. Tubbo opened the door, took one look at the state Tommy was in and ushered him inside his house. The next thing Tommy knew he was sitting on Tubbo's bed, his back against the bed frame with a box of tissues placed in front of him.

He couldn't think straight. The realisation that he had less than three months of *this*—belonging to a family, surrounded by people who cared about him—left until it was all gone, until *he* was all gone, overwhelmed him.

"I don't know how to comfort people," Tubbo said as he sat opposite him. "Wait here."

Tubbo grabbed the ukulele from the corner of his room and got back on the bed.

"You cry whilst I play the same song over and over again until you feel better." Tommy snorted into the tissue, only Tubbo could make him laugh whilst in the middle of a mental breakdown. "'Riptide' time!"

He leaned more against Tubbo's bed and breathed heavily, trying to stop it from hitching, as Tubbo played his ukulele. Surprisingly enough, Tubbo's rendition of the song was pretty calming to hear (besides the times he messed up the chords and shouted various swearwords, scaring the shit out of Tommy—though the jump scares did get rid of Tommy's hiccups).

An hour passed and Tubbo had moved onto 'Wonderwall', yet he made up his own lyrics after repeating the song twice. Tommy sat up, a lodge still stuck in his throat, but he knew that was all in his head, it wouldn't leave until the thoughts did. At least he had stopped crying.

"You wanna talk about what caused all this?" Tubbo asked as he absently strummed random chords.

He was tempted to lie, to say that it was stress caused by other events that he didn't care about. Like how he had exams coming up for school, preparing for his GCSEs that he would never sit since those begin in May and—

Maybe let's not talk about that.

Tubbo put his ukulele down and moved closer to him, just close enough so their shoulders touched. "What's wrong, Tommy?"

He shouldn't have come here. As much as he frequently annoyed Tubbo, he was one of the only people who he couldn't ignore, he couldn't lie to him. He could lie to Ranboo, sure, but not Tubbo (that was another lie). He had a problem with doing that.

"I've never felt part of a family before, since ages ago," since the pain and grief of Theseus, "and I don't know how to feel."

Sighing, Tommy turned to face Tubbo, which was another mistake since now he *definitely* couldn't lie to him now.

"I want to be close to them, be part of their family but... I'm scared I'm going to ruin it," he rubbed at his left wrist. "I *am* going to ruin it, just like I always fucking do. I know it."

"How would you ruin it?" Tubbo asked, quietly, holding the hand Tommy was scratching himself with.

"I have something I need to figure out about myself, and if I don't work it out, it's just going to take away everything I have here."

It would take *him* away from them, permanently. He wasn't even scared of dying at this point, it was the leaving the living behind that terrified him.

"You having an identity crisis or something?" Tubbo suggested. Tommy chuckled dryly, it did sound like he was without context.

"Kinda, but not in the way you're thinking," he said, staring down at their joined hands. He wouldn't call a curse from a God an identity crisis, but the crisis part was correct.

"Tommy, you deserve a family even if you think you'll do something to fuck it up," Tubbo said. "I've fucked up before with how I treated Niki at the beginning of her adoption, but she forgave me because she's my family."

"I've done it before. I'm the reason my first family fell apart, it's always my fault," Tommy whispered, his voice weak.

He remembered his brother's maddened words in the caves of Pogtopia, the cruel blame placed on him by the man who raised him, and the guilt that followed after he thought he was enough for his big brother to *stay*.

"It takes everyone in a family for it to fall apart, Tommy. Not just you." Tubbo threaded their fingers together. "You are a part of Phil's family, whether you like it or not. It's up to you to embrace that."

Tommy sighed again and rested his head on Tubbo's shoulder, not caring that the position was awkward due to their height difference.

"Thanks, Tubs," he mumbled. "Sorry for springing this onto you."

"I prefer playing the ukulele to you crying than doing my homework," Tubbo said and Tommy giggled into his shoulder.

“Shut the fuck up.”

A creaking sound came from the window. “Aw man, did I miss a bonding moment?”

“Ranboo what did I tell you about climbing through my window without warning me?”
Tubbo complained as if this was a normal occurrence (which it was).

“You wouldn’t answer your phone, so scaling your house was the only appropriate option,”
Ranboo replied.

“You couldn’t just knock at the door?”

“I get nervous, okay!”

Tommy laughed again; he was glad Ranboo was here.

As Tommy walked into his house, he stopped himself from addressing Dream by his full name and guessing the myth Pandora. Just the sight of everyone in the living room with Linda Smith and her fucking notepad waiting for him made him want to incorrectly guess his myth and die.

“Fuck off Linda, I’m not dealing with your shit,” he snapped and hurried up the stairs, slamming his bedroom door shut behind him.

His head hurt enough already, but now he had this bitch to deal with. Kinoko Foster Care really took the whole ‘unsuspected visits’ and ran with it.

He shrugged off his coat and collapsed onto the bed, hoping for the covers to smother him to death. Not even the cute, beady eyes of Henry could save Tommy from this fuckery. He grabbed his notebook from under his pillow and opened it to a new page.

Whilst delaying the inevitable visit from Linda, he might as well be productive with it. Last night he had the idea to write down all the events that had happened in this current life and attach themes to them. So far he had written down:

- *Don’t remember actual parents =
abandoned.*

- *Family vloggers as parents(?) =
violent, unfaithful marriage, hated children.*

- *Snitched on family vloggers to police = betrayal.*

- *Current home = second chance (hopefully).*

Though it didn't help much since betrayal, unfaithful marriages and hatred for children were popular themes in Greek mythology, especially with how the literal birth story for the Titans and Olympians applied to these.

He should probably add details of his Dream visits in there as well.

The knocking on his door was too annoying and patronising for it to *not* be Linda. She opened his door; the pestering sound of her cheap heels digging into the floor alerted him that she was in his room. Linda Smith didn't deserve the attention, so he just went with ignoring her.

"You still writing in that book?" she asked—well, more like demanded, but she never got her way with Tommy.

"Why's this any of your business?" he bit back, not looking up from his notebook.

"Sudden mood changes are a concern." She said the word 'concern' as if it was a threat, which it probably was since a certain amount of concerns resulted in relocation.

"As if you fucking care."

A tense silence followed; if he was looking at her, her face was probably all screwed up with disgust at him disrespecting her so-called authority.

"At least your room is decorated," she said and scribbled more down in her notepad. "These your friends?"

He had stuck more printed pictures of what he had taken in school onto his wall (including one where Ranboo was trying to stuff Tubbo into a locker). He didn't answer her question and instead added more information to his notebook, such as 'antagonistic women wanting to make my life a living hell'. That was a common feature for every single Greek myth that involved Hera, Queen of Olympus, and Goddess of marriage.

"Tom, as your social worker—"

"Don't call me that," he interrupted, anger thick on his tongue.

"You need to cooperate with me."

Tommy closed his notebook shut. "I'm not being neglected, malnourished or abused here. Now, can you stop pretending that you give a shit about your social worker protocol and get the fuck out of my home?"

“Your home?” she repeated. “That’s the first I’ve heard you call your fostering placement that.”

“Is it bad that I think of it as one?” he asked, daring her to disagree.

“It’s not bad. But it’s surprising.” Linda wrote another line into her notepad, disregarding the piercing glare Tommy sent her way.

She cleared her throat and opened his door again.

“I’ll conclude this as a short visit. I’ve got enough from the conversation I had with the family earlier.”

Tommy frowned, not liking the smirk on her face. She left his room before he could question her about what they talked about, which was more of a blessing—anything she said was utter bullshit.

He got changed and waited to hear the front door shut before going back downstairs. They were still sat on the sofas; Phil had paperwork in his hands which he sorted into a folder.

Not wasting a second, Tommy jumped onto the sofa and laid his head on Phil’s lap. He was too tired and drained to give a fuck. He turned to face himself more into Phil’s side until he was content.

“Did she bother you that much?” Phil asked as he combed his fingers through Tommy’s hair.

“Can I start a petition to revoke Linda Smith’s British citizenship?” Tommy asked, his words muffled.

Wilbur scoffed lightly from where he sat on the other end of the sofa. “You support Brexit or some shit?”

“Shut up, you’re the fucking Tory,” Tommy shot back, shuffling so he could see Wilbur. “You probably voted for UKIP.”

“Well, if you want to discuss British politics—”

“No,” Phil interjected, knowing that Wilbur could rant for hours about the problems with how much money the government funded to militarisation and defence.

“Let the man speak,” Techno encouraged.

“Would you prefer American politics then, Dad?”

“Shut,” Phil shouted light-heartedly. Tommy laughed and closed his eyes, leaning into Phil, who put his arm around him.

“Philza Minecraft, you are the bravest man I’ve ever met,” Tommy said, gazing up at him.

Phil knew what that look meant. “What do you want?”

“Can we get Dominos and watch Netflix?”

“We’re getting the chocolate cookies,” Techno added, knowing that Phil would cave in.

“Fine.”

“If you put on a Marvel film Tommy, I’m spitting in your pizza,” Wilbur said, glaring across at him.

Tommy sat up and chucked a pillow at Wilbur, only to scurry back to Phil’s side when Wilbur caught it.

“If you hit me, you hit Phil!”

Wilbur threw the pillow anyway.

Chapter 15

If Tommy was honest to himself, he really shouldn't spend most of his therapy sessions with Puffy just talking shit about Linda Smith. Puffy never tried to change the subject or direct it to something else, like maybe the massive number of issues and underlying trauma he had picked up from centuries of death and torment from Dream. But, as always, Tommy preferred to ignore that and talk about something else.

Nonetheless, he did get some heat off his chest with slagging off Linda for a solid hour—Puffy had to calm him down when he got a bit *too* into describing what he would do to Linda in a lawless world. Apparently wanting to curb stomp an elderly woman who was there to help foster children was an immoral thing to say (Puffy seemed to want to fight the women as well though).

The agreement he had with Wilbur was what he liked most out of these therapy sessions. This time, they sat on a picnic bench in the local park, snacking on the meal deals they bought from the Tesco Express. Wilbur still came out of his session crying, but it wasn't as bad as the last. A triple chicken sandwich distracted Wilbur enough.

"What do you talk about with your therapist to get you all... crying and shit?" Tommy asked as he took another bite from his sandwich.

"Stop talking with your mouth full, you disgusting child," Wilbur scolded. "And uh, we talked about my mum."

Tommy sipped on his drink as Wilbur fiddled with his hands, something he regularly did.

"I told him about the song I made about her and the idea I had to turn it into something else," he explained, peering past Tommy's head, almost as if he wasn't able to look Tommy in his eyes.

"Your Mother Was Right'?"

"Yeah, that one. I might just base it on a past breakup I had during year twelve," Wilbur said, looking back down at his hands. "God, her sister hated me during that relationship."

Tommy threw his Mars bar at Wilbur, catching his attention. He didn't like the anxiety rummaging in Wilbur's head. "Were you a dickhead or something?"

Wilbur chuckled humourlessly. "Yep. Some general advice for you: don't go into a relationship with someone after a family death. It's not a good idea."

"Her sister was right to hate you then," Tommy joked, hoping that if he treated this entire thing like a piss-take, then Wilbur would do the same. It was usually how he got out of dealing with sadness.

"Thanks for the new song title."

“Credit me, you prick.”

Brown eyes stared back at him, glinted with hilarity. “Nope.”

“You are the worst person I have ever met.”

“The worst person you have ever met literally bought you your food,” Wilbur quipped back, his shoulders more relaxed than before.

“Don’t gloat over buying me a three pound meal deal, that’s just sad.”

There was a sudden pause before the two burst out laughing. Warmth radiated in his chest, melting the Spring chill on his skin as Wilbur beamed at him, all anxiety forgotten about. He liked it better this way.

“Will, with your album,” Tommy began, his voice softer than usual. “Would you ever sing them to me?”

“If this goes well, I’ll sing them to everyone. You and Technoblade first,” Wilbur said with a timid smile.

“Why Techno?”

“I crave his validation.”

“From The Blade?” Tommy asked, his scowl creasing as Wilbur nodded. “You are a sad, sad man.”

“You keep calling me sad today.”

Tommy pointed to the opened tissue packet on the table and Wilbur whacked his hand away.

“What about singing them to Phil?” he asked.

Wilbur put down his sandwich. “He’ll be the hardest to do them to.”

“Well, I’ll have you know, I am the harshest song critic that you will ever meet. So, it should be worse to perform it to me,” Tommy replied, grinning.

The man rolled his eyes half-heartedly. “If you’re there as well, I’ll sing them to Dad later on.”

“I’ll be there,” Tommy said, his throat strained as he willed himself to forget that if Wilbur didn’t perform before the ninth of April, he wouldn’t be here at all.

Wilbur’s lips formed into a smile, his eyes lingering on Tommy before he continued eating his sandwich.

Tommy’s phone vibrated on the picnic table. He grimaced and hesitated before replying.

Niki<3:

Niki: I need to talk to you if that's alright.

Tommy: I'm in the park with wilbur. you can join us if you want

He put his phone back on the bench, no longer hungry.

“Who was that?” Wilbur asked.

“Niki, she needs to talk to me.”

“What about?”

Tommy froze. “Maths.”

“Maths?” Wilbur repeated, sceptical.

“Yep, mathematics, Pythagoras, equilateral triangles and all that,” Tommy rambled, avoiding eye contact.

“You're so shit at lying,” Wilbur scoffed. “I'll leave you two alone when she comes.”

“Good, I don't think you'd want to be here when we go on our rants about how much we dislike Wilbur Craft.”

“You are the reason I need therapy.”

“No, I'm the reason you're getting therapy.”

Wilbur ruffled his hair harshly from across the table. “Disrespect me again, I dare you.”

“You are a bitch,” Tommy exclaimed as he tried to fight against Wilbur's hold on him.

The two continued to attack each other across the picnic table until a feminine voice interjected from behind them, “Am I interrupting something?”

“Oh hey Niki, you can join me in beating the shit out of Tommy if you want,” Wilbur said nonchalantly as he strangled the boy.

“This is child abuse!”

Niki pulled Wilbur's ear until he let go of Tommy.

“Niki, what the fuck? You traitor.”

“I came here to talk to Tommy, not to watch him die,” Niki said as she sat beside Wilbur. Her hair was styled differently today, the pink dye had faded and appeared blonder. She was still in her sixth form clothes from school earlier.

“Anyway, Niki do you want the rest of my crisps before I go?” Wilbur offered.

“So you give them to her but not me?”

“Yes.” Tommy gaped at him.

“No thank you, Will,” Niki replied, a small smile on her lips as Tommy glared at Wilbur.

Wilbur stood up and threw the crisp packet in the bin, saluting at an annoyed Tommy as he walked away. Now that it was just Tommy and Niki, the boy grew nervous. He had an idea of what Niki wanted to talk about (since there was only one thing it could be), but he wanted to discuss this with Puffy before he decided if he should forgive Niki or not.

Ever since he realised she was Nihachu, the physical similarities between the two were obvious, yet the slight differences threw him off. The Nihachu he knew was nineteen, with her youth disrupted by the commotion of warfare and responsibility, and eyes darker, burdened by lives she had slain during the conflict. This Nihachu, this *Niki*, was younger, more relaxed; there were no scars across her face, no slit in her eyebrow and no bloodshed staining her skin. She was free and that was all Tommy hoped to achieve.

“How are you?” he asked after the silence, not quite sure how to start this conversation or if he should wait for her to say something first.

“I’m fine,” Niki said. She exhaled sharply. “I want to explain myself, or uh, just tell you what I think about all this with our past. If you’ll let me.”

He nodded and Niki sighed again, preparing herself.

“When I joined the Revolution, I always admired you. Even if you annoyed me sometimes with how impulsive you were in battle, that carefree part of you was so... intoxicating. You made me feel lighter, younger whilst we were on the brink of another war. Though, after your brother died, that intoxication I felt died along with him.” Niki fiddled with her necklace as she spoke. “I blamed you for everything, for causing the wars, for instigating more conflict, for- for your brother dying. But even after your exile, the conflict still happened. It wasn’t your doing.”

Tommy pulled his coat around him, hating the self-deprecation plastered on Niki’s face and guilt riddling in her eyes. “But I did cause more conflict—”

“We both wronged each other,” Niki interrupted, taking his hand. “But my wronging of you resulted in your death. So let me apologise, okay?”

He looked down at Niki’s hands; her nails were painted a pastel blue. He remembered how she and Fundy used to gather materials so she could do nail art during the calmer periods before the major wars—they used beeswax, egg whites and dyes from flowers. The result was never pretty, but she loved it, *they all* loved it. He preferred those times before any of them had taken a life and could never look at an innocent Kingdom civilian the same way.

“You’re right that I did abandon you in exile. I stood by as you were sent away and I regretted that decision every single day until I died on that battlefield. I had failed someone I saw, and still see, as a younger brother.” Tommy flinched and she held his hands tighter. “I failed you Tommy, and I’m so sorry for that.”

A part of him just wanted to say that it was okay, reassure Niki that it was all in the past and didn’t matter anymore. But he didn’t want to lie to himself about this. Even though it was in the past, every single void visit reminded him of his relentless suffering in exile, where a man he thought was his *friend*, instead of his captor and abuser, never left him alone, never let a day pass without another scar—whether physical or mental—haunting him. It wasn’t *okay*, and it couldn’t be until he healed from it. Yet that would take years, years he didn’t have.

Niki squeezed his hand softly, snapping him out of his thoughts. Her blue eyes glistened with tears and her eyebrows furrowed. She was waiting for his response, but he didn’t have one.

“You don’t have to forgive me, Tommy,” Niki whispered over the cold wind.

He bit on his cheek and fiddled with the rings on Niki’s fingers. He focused on Clementine’s advice; to recover from this, he needed to know more about the aftermath.

“What was it like after I died?” he asked, his voice hesitant. He hadn’t read this part in his history textbook—he didn’t want to learn about that from an inaccurate and biased point-of-view that butchered Niki’s history as well. He figured out that Nick Chu was Niki; no wonder she hated that class.

“It was peaceful for a while, quieter,” Niki said, her honest words lodging a sword through his heart. “But loveless. The one person who still had joy for the Revolution, optimism for freedom and the compassion to endure as many wars the world threw at them, had gone.”

A tear fell down her cheeks. “Tobias then failed to secure peace and we knew what we had to do. We had to kill George but even our President wasn’t keen on that idea. Either way, our Revolution ended with bloodshed, with mine, Fundy and George’s deaths, and Tobias fled to establish Snowchester.”

Tommy didn’t understand how she could say such news, such events with a soft tone, no bitterness or spite present. But it seemed she used her centuries in the void to accept this. Though he was glad he wasn’t there to see the tragic fate of the Revolution his brother founded, to see his former best friend abandon his people and fellow soldiers die to a losing battle.

“What was my brother like in the void?” he asked, his eyes lingering on the necklace around Niki’s neck, the one his brother crafted.

Niki fidgeted in her seat. “He was... different. After every rebirth, he came back more broken than before. He asked me to stand at the gates every day he wasn’t there in case you showed up. He may not have shown that he loved you during his last moments alive, but he did. He did love you.”

Tommy believed her words, or at least wanted to believe they were true. He savoured the times where his brother wasn't destroyed by Eret's betrayal, corrupting the fight for freedom into a quest for power and control. He missed the man who always drew small circles into Tommy's shoulder with his thumb whenever they hugged, the man who gazed at Tommy as if he was the only shining star in the empty sky. He loved the man his brother *used* to be. He wasn't sure about the man he died as.

Niki unclasped her necklace and placed it in Tommy's hands, a sad smile hindering the kindness in her eyes. "Take it. He'd want you to have it."

He touched the stone tied to a frail rope and sighed; he was there when his brother crafted them, each necklace had a different coloured stone with Niki's one being white. He fiddled with the necklace before putting it on, the weight felt natural around his neck.

"Thank you," he mumbled and cleared his throat, wanting to change the subject from his brother. "Anyway, what's your myth in this life then?"

Niki blinked at the conversation change, her eyes still glued to the necklace.

"You better have not been Oedipus." Niki frowned. "No, no, you are not a mother-fucker."

She rolled her eyes and shook her head. "No, I wasn't the incest guy. I was Daphne. The nymph who was shot with a hatred arrow for Apollo whilst he lusted over her because of Eros' arrow."

"Oh. That must've not ended well for you," Tommy said, grimacing.

"Having a myth that results in an obsessive man stalking you, despite being rejected multiple times, was not fun," she muttered. "It's why I moved from Germany to here."

"Does Tubbo know about the curse?"

"No, he knows about the tattoo, but he thinks it's related to some German mafia."

Tommy paused, then remembered the weird conversation he had with Tubbo when he went around his house. "Is that why Tubbo thinks I don't like Germany?"

"If he saw your tattoo, then yes."

"Well, that explains it," he said.

A silence followed and Tommy huffed; he didn't know where to go from here. Niki expected a response from him.

"I don't think I can forgive you yet. But I'm fine with you if that makes sense," he eventually said, his throat closed up. Niki nodded. "I'm sorry as well, I did abandon you too, especially after he died."

"You were grieving, you shouldn't have needed to comfort me during that," she said, sorrow on her face.

“Stop trying to defend me, I fucked up.”

“I’ve had many years in that void with the other people who wronged me too, I’ve healed from it,” she reassured.

“That’s what I need to do now.” Tommy didn’t know how he was going to get over it, get past exile and recover from the wounds that were centuries deep. But he’d try.

Dream deciding to give him a visit as soon as he fell asleep when he got home fucked with Tommy’s path of recovery though.

He was back on the beach that the boat took him to before. Well, it looked more like an island now. Dream stood there, waiting for him, an empty table by his side.

Tommy walked over, the wind violating his exposed skin. “We’re not playing that board game again, are we?”

“No, we’re not playing the Knossos Game,” Dream answered. “I need to show you something.”

Dream reached forward and gripped Tommy’s arm harshly, and before he knew it, the void swallowed him whole. His eyes flew open, dazed and distressed, as he regained consciousness. Dream no longer stood by his side; he was alone in a dark apartment.

The walls had wood panelling, bowl lights hung from the ceiling. A dark green sofa with orange pillows sat in front of an old television. There were framed pictures on the walls of a mother with a baby in her arms and two younger children by her side. The mother had bruises under her eyes from a lack of sleep but the smile adorned on her lips as she gazed down at the baby cuddled to her chest brightened her entire face. Tommy pulled back the striped curtains, he was in a city apartment, probably during the 1950s or 1960s.

He walked into the closest room and two children lay in their beds with their mother asleep on the chair beside them. The mother’s hand perched on the side of the bed; she was probably holding her son’s hand before the exhaustion took over. Shelves were nailed above their beds, one had dinosaur figures placed on them and the other had old play dolls. A comfortable feeling rumbled in his chest as he stared at the family, the love between them was obvious, but it confused him. Why did Dream bring him here? To rub in that *this* was what a loving and stable family looked like, something Tommy never grew up with? He didn’t know.

He went back into the living room and a startling noise came from around the corner. It came from a pink crib which had a baby girl inside. He stepped closer and the baby started to cry.

“Hey, no, no, shh, it’s okay.” Tommy picked her up and held the baby, rubbing her back to calm her down. He continued whispering, “You’re alright, you’re fine.”

Tommy cradled her head with his hands, trying to be as gentle as possible, and rocked her until the cries slowly stopped. He smiled down at the baby, its wide and innocent eyes staring back at him. A toothless grin came across her face as he tickled under her chin.

“Hello, little one,” he said, softly, still smiling. “What’s your name?”

With his other hand, he carefully pulled the blankets from the crib to see the name ‘Estella’ embroidered on it. He wrapped it around her.

“Estella,” he murmured. “That’s a beautiful name.”

The baby giggled, her tiny hands attempted to grab onto his fingers. He allowed her to do so and she instantly chewed them. “You’re lucky you’re cute, you can get away with using me a chew-toy.”

His thumb caressed her cheek, drawing little patterns on her skin with his thumb just like his brother used to do with him. He walked with Estella to the window and looked over the city from a high distance. Only some streetlights were on, and those that were flickered at timed intervals.

A separate apartment building was opposite them, one room was lit and a cloaked figure stared at them. Tommy held Estella tighter to his chest, narrowing his eyes at the figure. A taunting smile reflected; it was Dream. The masked man pointed to the street, Tommy followed his direction and frowned at another figure running from the bottom floor of the other apartment building. The tall figure had a beanie on with a grey streak of hair peeking through. Tommy looked back up to the lit room but it was empty.

Uncomfortable, he continued rubbing Estella’s back and moved to close the curtains.

Windows smashing and concrete crumbling beneath itself reached his ears before a violent fire and explosion blurred his vision. The apartment opposite him burst into flames from the bottom floor, bricks cracked from its layering. A dust cloud immersed the street.

Tommy froze, his voice locked in his throat. His ears rang and Estella’s high-pitched cries rattled the apartment. His grip on her tightened and he ran towards the children’s rooms. More explosions clattered the streets and he rushed to wake the family up.

Tears slipped down his face, the family laid silent. Everything Tommy did to wake them up didn’t work. Estella shrieked as the floor beneath them rumbled. Another explosion sounded, the walls shook and Tommy ran, Estella clutched to his side, down the apartment stairs.

His heart pounded and his knees weakened as cracks splintered the staircase. Broken pieces of concrete flew at his body, cutting his skin. He tried to console the crying baby in his arms. For once, in all his lives, Tommy was scared to die.

Fumes watered his eyes and his flesh burned. Fire, blood and dust engulfed them. The single cry of a baby bounced off the walls as he kissed the top of her head. The floor collapsed, taking them both with it.

Someone kicked him awake. His lungs ached as fresh air encased them. He opened his irritated eyes to a dark room. Tommy clawed at his chest but the lack of weight in his arms, the lack of Estella instilled fear in his core. His breathing hastened, panic rendering him useless.

“Estella?” he yelled, the stabbing in his throat didn’t stop him from screaming out her name, hoping that this wasn’t real, that she was safe in that fucking crib and none of this ever happened—

Steps echoed through the dark room. He scrambled backwards, whimpers left his quivering lips. Dream towered over him, his mask painted with blood.

“What- what was that? Dream, what the fuck was that?” he stammered, his body tense and exploited.

“You asked me questions in our last visit that I couldn’t answer,” Dream replied, his tone too casual for what Tommy had just witnessed. “This is me answering.”

“Where’s Estella?” he demanded. “Where the fuck is she?”

The sigh that left Dream only furthered the fear and doubt in Tommy.

“Please, Dream, where is she?” he repeated, more desperate this time.

The lack of response killed the growing hope in him, he didn’t want the answer to be true.

“Why did you...” Tommy’s voice broke down into sobs. He wrapped his arms around himself, trying to mimic the comfort Estella brought him. “Why did you show me that?”

“That wasn’t all,” Dream said and light in the room flickered. Two figures stood in the room, the man he saw earlier running away from the other apartment before it exploded, and another version of Dream. This Dream’s mask wasn’t stained with blood.

The two were arguing as the man with the beanie drew tallies on the whiteboard in front of him. Tommy crept closer, the man’s face illuminated against the light. It was his brother.

He scrambled backwards to Dream, gripping onto his cloak as his head ached.

A radio turned on beside them, announcing two explosions that went off in central North Dakota, detonating apartment complexes and taking a confirmed two-hundred and seventy lives. The tragedy was another act initiated by a terrorist named Willow’s Siren.

His stomach dropped as he realised the tallies his brother had written on the whiteboard matched the number of confirmed deaths from the explosion caused by Willow’s Siren... caused by W. Soot. His big brother.

Police sirens thundered from outside the dark room, and the other Dream began to shout. Yet, the words didn’t register in Tommy’s ears as bile lodged in his throat.

His brother grabbed a knife from the counter and plunged it deep into his heart. He fell backwards into the whiteboard and opened his mouth to speak, “Zagreus, son of Zeus and Persephone, God of hunting and rebirth, I am Medusa.”

Dream grasped onto Tommy’s shoulder and with tears in his eyes and screaming in his head, they appeared on top of the maze walls, in the void again.

He didn’t understand what was going on, he didn’t understand why Dream was doing this to *him*. His brother was a fucking murderer, his brother killed that family, killed—

Tommy dropped to the floor, sobs wrecked his throat. He hugged himself as he shook, tears drowning his misery. Dream kneeled in front of him and placed a hand on his back. The masked man whispered comforting words, just like Tommy did to Estella, until he could breathe again.

“What... what happened?” Tommy wept, gripping at his chest with guilt.

“You asked me why I didn’t tell you your brother was cursed, and *that* was why,” Dream said, bitterly. “Your brother took advantage of his immortality and caused destruction in every single life. He realised the potential he could achieve in a world where you never have to face the legal repercussions of your actions when you could restart just by guessing incorrectly.”

Tommy’s tears continued to fall, his heart faltering. All this time, he was grieving and remembering a man who slaughtered innocents for centuries, who thrived on chaos. He thought death would’ve healed his brother’s broken soul, but it only fuelled the madness.

“What did the other version of you say to him? Before he- before he...” he trailed off, his bottom lip trembled.

“I gave him an ultimatum. Either he disclosed his myth, that he already knew was his, or I would drown him in the River Lethe and send him to Tartarus, breaking his curse of immortality,” Dream explained and Tommy’s breath hitched.

“What option did he choose?” he asked, frightened of the answer he would get.

Dream remained silent.

“Where is my brother?”

“He guessed incorrectly. The brother you knew is gone.”

More tears shed and guilt wormed into his heart; he was mourning a murderer, a terrorist, *his big brother*. The man, who hugged him close when the dark nights after the First War got too hard for Tommy to handle on his own, was imprisoned in the infernal abyss of torment and suffering, the deepest level of the Underworld. Tartarus.

Dream reached for his arm and Tommy jerked backwards; he didn’t want to be shown any more of *this*. He underestimated how small the maze walls were and slipped, his back hurdling to the ground before Dream caught him by his hand.

The breath left his lungs as he hung, the only thing keeping him from falling to his death was the hand of the God who dropped Theseus in his first life.

“Dream, please, please just tell me,” Tommy beseeched as he squeezed Dream’s hands. “Is my brother still alive?”

“He is, though he’s not your brother anymore. The River Lethe makes you forget who you are, its water strips you of *everything*, your identity, your memories, your appearance. Everything.”

The grip between them wavered as Dream continued, “But, I did grow tired of watching your brother act like an amnesiac ghost crying in Tartarus, so I let him be reborn into another body, without the curse, without the memories of who he really is.”

“Where- where is he?” Tommy demanded, his legs kicking at the vines on the maze wall to secure his safety.

“That’s the exciting part. He’s still a brother to you.” Dream’s grip loosened as a cruel smile twisted on his lips. “Say hello to Wilbur for me.”

And Tommy fell.

He woke up screaming. He thrashed violently against hands that held him down. His throat scratched itself raw until the view of his bedroom rendered for him. His entire world, his entire memory of his brother had shattered and rebuilt into something more terrifying and traumatising right in front of him.

Someone beside his bed grabbed his arms, holding them still as the adrenaline left his system and a frail mess remained behind. Techno, with his pink hair braided, sat by his side and consoled him as tears poured from his eyes and wails strained his chest.

Another pair of arms touched him, and the brown eyes that once brought warmth to Tommy chilled his core. He screamed again, more hysteric than the last, as Wilbur reached to comfort him. He flinched backwards, his body shaking into Techno. This- this was his brother, Wilbur was his brother whether he remembered himself or not. This was the man who blew up the nation he founded, massacred thousands until Tartarus detained him.

“Get away from me, get away. Please, please just go—” Tommy begged, his voice breaking with every plea as he backed further into Techno. He shut his eyes and leaned into Techno’s shoulder, wishing that this was still part of the void, that this was just part of Dream’s tricks.

“Wilbur, I’ve got this. Go back to bed,” Techno whispered as he put his arms around Tommy.

He opened his eyes to see hurt flash across Wilbur's face as he left the room, but all Tommy could think of was the distress on Estella's face as the building crashed around them.

"It's okay, Tommy," Techno said, his voice low and tender. "It was just a nightmare."

Tommy shook his head in Techno's shoulder. "No, no, it wasn't a nightmare. It's real- it's real and I can't—"

"Shh," Techno soothed, rubbing his back. "Calm down, it's alright."

He didn't know how long had passed until his breathing evened and his face dried. Techno tucked Tommy back into his bed.

"I'll stay here until you fall back asleep," Techno said as Tommy's eyes drooped with exhaustion. He didn't want to deal with this anymore.

"Can you..." he stopped himself. "No, don't worry."

"What do you need?" Techno asked, earnestly.

"Can you keep talking?" he said. He couldn't fall asleep to silence, or even alone, not after what he had seen.

"Now, if Wilbur was here, he'd sing you to sleep but I'll do you one better, I'll recite The Art of War for you to fall asleep to." Tommy tried to conceal his flinch at the mention of Wilbur.

"Thank you," he mumbled, resting his head against his pillow.

His eyes shut and consciousness slipped, with Techno's voice anchoring him to a peaceful rest. A rest that didn't haunt him with the knowledge that the man he was closest to in this family was the same person who abandoned him in a world stained with war and blood, whether Wilbur was aware of it or not.

Chapter 16

As the sunlight hit his face, he knew it would be a bad day.

He was used to nightmares about his own past lives, but nightmares of his brother's lives terrified him. He didn't even know if what he dreamt after the Dream visit was real, if his brother causing more unnecessary wars and bloodshed actually happened. Regardless, it left him shaking and frail, helplessly watching someone who raised him commit such inhumane actions, unable to stop it.

Techno was asleep on a chair to his right. He must've pushed his lounge chair from his bedroom into here after Tommy fell asleep. The corner of his lips twitched at the considerate act; Techno made sure Tommy didn't wake up alone after another potential nightmare. But the warmth inside of him quickly overheated, burning him just like that explosion did as the resemblance set in. The mother had done the same thing for her children in that apartment. She laid by their side until they fell asleep, to keep them safe when they were most vulnerable. Yet not even the love a mother felt for their young could protect them from his brother's terrorism.

He wept silently, clutching Henry to his chest, but the stuffed animal couldn't fulfil the weight he needed. With bleary eyes, he looked down at Henry and empty beads stared back. It wasn't the same. Estella was gone and he had to accept that.

Tommy sat up, the phantom pains from falling to his death in the void aching his back. He grabbed his notebook from underneath his pillow, Henry still resting under his chin. His hands shook as he opened it to a familiar page. For once, he didn't want to update his file on Dream's visits. But he could do this, he could write this. He was fine.

*Dream said that Wilbur is my brother. ~~Or was he lying?~~
He hasn't lied about rebirth before.*

He held his pen tighter, the plastic digging into his palm. It was fine, it was all fine.

*He showed me what Wilbur did in his past lives.
But he doesn't remember it now. ~~Or does~~
Wilbur doesn't remember.*

Iron bled into his mouth; he had bitten into his lips. Teardrops dampened the paper and he broke. It wasn't fine. He couldn't do this, he couldn't handle this. It was one shitty thing after another and he never caught a fucking break.

"What do you even write in that book?" Tommy jumped at Techno's voice, the man was awake. "Oh, you're crying."

Tommy wiped his face with his covers and put the notebook back under the pillow. "Nice observation there, big man."

“I mean, I’m just stating the obvious,” Techno said.

A silence fell between them. Tommy opened his mouth to speak, to maybe even thank Techno for calming him down when he woke up, for not leaving him alone and sending Wilbur away despite not knowing why the sight of the man invoked fear into him. But the words wouldn’t leave his lips.

“Don’t be cringe,” Techno declared, sitting up in his chair.

“What?”

“I don’t need to hear your heartfelt or thankful words,” he explained. “Especially this early in the morning.”

Tommy scowled at him, his eyes still red. “How’d you know I was gonna say anything nice?”

“Your body tenses every time as if it’s against your natural coding to say nice things to people.”

“Stop psychoanalysing me, you prick,” Tommy snapped as he pushed his covers around him to hide his body.

“Now look, your shoulders are relaxed.”

“This is harassment.”

“No, this is the result of that one psychology class I took before I dropped out of college.”

“Get out of my room so I can get ready for school,” Tommy said. Techno laughed and dragged the chair out of the room, shutting the door behind him.

Tommy exhaled sharply, it tugging in his chest as the loneliness settled in. To delay the family breakfast, he slowly got ready for school. The stairs creaked as he ambled down them. Techno and Phil were sat at the table, whilst Wilbur was busy in the kitchen.

“Morning,” he said as he joined them at the table. He needed to act normally, initiate and partake in the usual conversations they had at meals, maybe even call someone a dickhead at least once for no one to suspect anything.

“Will, if you flip those pancakes anymore, it’s going to split,” Phil called out. Tommy cleared his throat and poured himself some water.

“I’ll have you know my pancake batter is superior to yours.” Wilbur walked from the kitchen with a plate of stacked pancakes in his hands. “And that’s not my problem if they split, they’re for Tommy.”

He stared down at the plate placed in front of him. The soft smile from Wilbur entrapped him in safety, but the weak part of him begged to jerk backwards, to get away from him. A war waged in his head yet each side was a losing battle. On one end, he wanted to bathe in the comfort Wilbur brought, let the man ruffle his hair, but it also meant being content with the

fact that this was his *brother*, he desired to be comforted by a fucking murderer. Whilst on the other end, he wanted to jump away from any contact with the man, sickness crept up his throat at the mere sight of him, but that wasn't fair on Wilbur. He didn't remember his rebirth, his past lives. This man was innocent, oblivious to the blood on his hands.

Either way, Tommy was fucked. Whether that meant he drowned in his selfishness and self-hatred, or in terror and guilt. A double-edged sword that punctured his heart no matter the angle he chose.

"If I start crying, do I get one?" Techno snapped Tommy out of his daze.

"No, you get nothing." Wilbur sat down to Tommy's right, goosebumps pricked at his skin.

"Thank you," Tommy mumbled under his breath, still staring down at the food Wilbur had made specifically for *him*. The same man—who didn't care about the families or innocent people in those apartment buildings—woke up earlier and prepared a whole meal just for his foster brother. Not even his own blood, for a foster kid.

He knew they weren't the same person, physically and mentally, that only his brother's cleansed soul resided in Wilbur. But it didn't make him feel any better.

"You doing okay, Tommy?" Phil asked, his blue eyes glinted with concern. "You're quieter than usual."

"I'm fine," he said as he stuck a fork into a pancake that he didn't have the stomach to eat.

"Nervous for parent's evening?"

Fuck, he forgot that was today. "Nope, all teachers love me."

"I've read your history coursework, Tommy," Techno interjected, brushing off the glare Tommy directed his way. "They don't."

"All valid teachers love me."

"What makes a teacher not valid?" Wilbur asked as he reached over to pick up a piece of toast. Tommy suppressed a flinch.

He gulped and tried not to face Wilbur as he spoke, "There's a criteria."

"One of the things on the criteria is that they teach history," Techno further explained.

"See, he gets it."

"Your parent's evening is going to be painful, isn't it?" Phil sighed, exasperated.

"It will be entertaining, at the least," Tommy said. "But if you get embarrassed, just pull the 'I didn't raise him, he's a foster kid' card."

“I won’t get embarrassed,” Phil argued, though the confidence left his spirit as Tommy snorted at him. “Okay, as immoral as that is, I will consider it.”

Tommy grinned. “Good on you.”

The conversation continued and he tried to ignore his raging heartbeat, he didn’t think one breakfast meal could bring him this much anxiety.

“I’m going to school early, I need to talk to Tubbo about something. I’ll walk.” He didn’t need to talk to Tubbo, in fact, the boy had been late to form for the past week (despite how he lived five minutes away from the school). But he wanted this to end quickly.

Wilbur frowned. “I could drive us now—”

“No, it’s fine.” Tommy interrupted, his voice too clipped to not be distrustful.

“Alright, have fun at school,” Phil said.

“I won’t!” he called out, trying to sound as cheerful as possible, as he picked up his bag and exited the house.

The weight on his shoulders didn’t ease as he walked to school, maybe it was because he didn’t call someone a dickhead during breakfast.

The day dragged on, but it felt worse at lunch. He was on his usual bench, with Ranboo and Tubbo talking to each other opposite him. They had already attempted many times to include Tommy in the conversation but failed. He wanted to talk to someone about Wilbur, rather than their weird tangents. But, even if he were to speak about Wilbur to them, they wouldn’t understand—Ranboo would probably think he was sleep-deprived (which was true) and Tubbo would somehow link it to the German mafia (again).

There was only one person who would believe him. Niki. Already regretting his decision, he messaged her if she was in one of the music practice rooms like she normally was during lunch.

When she confirmed that she was, Tommy stood up from the bench. “I’m going to the bathroom. I’ll be right back.”

He hastened his way to the music block and entered the room Niki was in. She greeted him with a strum on the guitar.

“Hey, what do you need me for?” she asked, smiling brightly at him.

He paused and sat down on a chair, rummaging through his thoughts. He wasn't sure if Niki knew about his brother, about the truth of what he did during his past lives and his ultimate fate.

"Did you know what Dream did to my brother?" he asked, trying to keep his voice steady.

"Tommy, I've already told you, I don't know who Dream is," Niki said, calmly. "I've only heard of him because of your exile journal during history."

Tommy flinched at the reminder that someday he would be learning about that part of his first life.

"So you don't know," he concluded. If Niki didn't know who Dream was, then she didn't know what fate he gave his brother, with Lethe and Tartarus.

"I don't know what?"

He bit on his cheek before asking, "Did he ever tell you what he did during his past lives?"

"No, he always brushed it off when I brought it up," she answered, more confused than before. "Well, he told me about his failed guess of Medusa before he disappeared for the last time. He probably guessed correctly after that because he didn't come back to the void."

His brother had lied to her. She didn't know that Wilbur was him, that he was drowned in the River Lethe and tortured in Tartarus until it bored Dream.

Would it be the right thing to tell her, to break her spirit and ruin her hope for his brother's freedom from the curse? He doubted that Niki would tell him the truth if she knew, she would keep it to herself and let Tommy believe his big brother became a better person after his death. For peace of mind.

"Why are you asking me all this?" Niki asked. "Did Dream show you your brother or something?"

The hopeful look in Niki's eyes broke his heart. He smiled tightly as his eyes stung. "Yeah, he showed me him." He sniffed. "He was taken into the Elysian Fields after he guessed correctly."

"Elysium?" she repeated. "Holy shit. See I told you he changed after his death. Even if he was a bit... unstable, he was trying to be better."

His mouth thinned, guilt riddling in his stomach as he let the girl believe his brother was in the paradise where heroes lived after death. He never really understood how ignorance was bliss until she reached over and hugged him, happiness practically propelling off her.

"That's good, that's great," she whispered. "Oh, you're wearing the necklace."

His throat strained as he gripped at the necklace he forgot was clasped around his neck. The rope strangled him, the white stone hissed at his skin. He rushed to remove it. "I was going to give it back to you. He made it for you, not me."

Niki's face furrowed. "If that's what you want, then okay."

Relief flooded through him as she took it off him. The loudest voice in his head wanted to cry, pleaded to not bottle up everything and wait for it to inevitably explode on him, but he never did listen to himself. He had cried over his brother, over Wilbur, too many times today.

He just needed to get over this. Somehow.

Tommy almost fell asleep in his last lesson of the day (chemistry, of course), but the constant vibrating coming from his phone in his blazer pocket kept him awake. It was Clementine spamming him with pictures of cute animals she saved on Twitter, which meant she was in maths class—it was a ritual thing she did during that lesson.

His phone vibrated again after a two-minute silence and he moved Ranboo's pencil case in front of him, ignoring the confusion from the boy.

Moth:

Clementine: also, you ok? You looked off during English earlier x

Tommy: I'm fine, just tired.

Clementine: ok! Hope you feel better later, get some rest after parents evening today x

Tommy: will do, ty clem :D

Clementine: [video attached]

He muffled his laughter with his hand. Clementine always sent him weird edits she downloaded from TikTok whenever their conversations ended, with this one being an edit of Peppa Pig to the song 'Jealousy, Jealousy' by Olivia Rodrigo. After the third video similar to this, Tommy decided not to question it whenever she sent them.

Though, his bad mood returned as he read another text message

Year 13 Resit:

Wilbur: r u walking home again?

Tommy: yeah

Wilbur: ok.

**are u feeling better btw? bc of last night
toms?**

Tommy: [message deleted] I fucking hate you and I shouldn't. Sorry.

He squeezed his phone so hard in his hand that he thought the screen might crack. Disregarding the text messages, he picked up his pen and copied down whatever chemistry bullshit was written on the whiteboard at the front.

Ranboo tapped on his shoulder. "You good man?"

Tommy clenched his jaw. He was fucking sick of people asking him that all day. He was fine, he was perfectly fine.

"Yeah, why?" he answered, trying to seem unbothered but the gritting of his teeth really didn't support that appearance.

"You've written down that question four times already," Ranboo said, pointing at Tommy's paper, which to put it frankly, was a mess. "You sure you're good?"

He sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. This day just got worse and worse.

"I didn't get much sleep last night," he said at last. Being honest was the only thing keeping him from taking his anger out on Ranboo, something he didn't ever want to do.

Ranboo retrieved his coat from the back of his chair and laid it on top of Tommy's chemistry work. "Get some sleep dude. Miss can't see you from where she sits."

At the mention of sleep, Tommy's head drooped forward and his eyes briefly fluttered.

"I might have another nightmare," he whispered.

"I'll be here," Ranboo said and puffed up his coat so the makeshift pillow was more comfortable. "Trust me, it's fine to sleep."

He hesitated before laying his head down, still facing Ranboo. The other boy grabbed his hand and held it reassuringly as Tommy drifted off to sleep.

Later on, Tommy sat in the front of the car as Phil drove to the school for the parent's evening appointment. A little voice in his head begged for him to grab the steering wheel and just crash the car. It was a morbid thought, but a necessary one. Maybe a little bit more fucked than usual, especially since Phil was in the car as well and that man wasn't capable of doing anything wrong in his life (there were no counter-arguments to this objective fact).

Though, Phil had been sighing for the past two minutes, which was worrying. As they drove through the school gates and parked, Phil turned off the car but didn't move to get out.

He stopped and faced Tommy. "You want to say anything before you get shitted on by your teachers?"

"Do not believe a word that comes out of Miss Allingham's mouth," Tommy said. "And anyone else's for that matter."

Phil sighed once more before exiting the car.

"Is there a teacher that actually likes you?" Phil asked as they walked into the school entrance.

"Uh," he struggled to name one. "My head of year, I guess. But there was that time she found out I pulled the fire alarm—"

"You pulled what?" he exclaimed, loudly, attracting the attention of other parents.

"Oh yeah, they were going to call you so I asked Techno to steal your phone and fake a British accent," Tommy explained before pausing. "Wait, I shouldn't have said that."

"How did you even convince Techno to do that for you?" Phil asked in disbelief.

"I did his chores for a month."

"You little shit," he muttered.

As much as Tommy dreaded his teachers telling Phil how much of a problem he was in class (they used many synonyms to professionally call him an annoying twat that should shut the fuck up), it wasn't *that* bad. Even though Miss King hated him and threatened to change the seating plan so Clementine wasn't next to him if he didn't behave better, he got good grades so Phil wasn't as fussed. Phil had tried to be civil with all the teachers until Miss Allingham's appointment. It went downhill from there.

Tommy shifted in the chair as Miss Allingham began to complain about him. "It seems your son treats my lessons like art classes."

"Are they at least good drawings?" Phil asked. Tommy failed to conceal his laughter and ignored the softness in his chest as Phil didn't correct her that Tommy technically wasn't his son. "Look, all I want to know is if he'll pass this class."

"He'll pass if he sticks to the essay structures I give him and stops putting in his opinion—"

“Why can’t I put in my opinion when I’m answering a question that requires it?” Tommy challenged.

“Because your opinion contradicts the entire teachings of our history,” he glared at her proclaimed ownership of *his* history, she did jackshit during the wars whilst he bled for them. “Your arguments need to be based on fact and supported by evidence, which you don’t use.”

Tommy grinned widely at her. “I’ll have you know I’m pretty based.”

Phil groaned from beside him. Miss Allingham gaped at Phil, almost expecting him to whack Tommy across the head for misbehaving.

“I can see why Tommy isn’t disciplined in my classes then,” she spat with spite.

Tommy leaned forward to roast the fuck out of this woman (whether with his words or actions), but Phil placed a hand on his shoulder.

“No, Tommy, don’t say anything. She’s right,” Phil said, his voice suddenly filled with sorrow. “Y’know as a single, working father I try my best to discipline the children I foster from struggling homes, but at least have some respect. Especially after Tommy’s biological parents recently passed away from a tragic plane crash.”

Tommy gawked at him. Holy fuck. Miss Allingham looked as if she was about to cry.

He didn’t even remember his biological parents, but they probably would go abroad on a holiday without him since they left him on the doorstep of a fucking orphanage.

“Oh,” she mumbled. “I wasn’t aware of his… situation. My condolences.”

Tommy covered his mouth with his hand, trying not to laugh.

Phil nodded, sadness and appreciation in his eyes. “Is there anything else we need to discuss? My other two sons at home are looking after the baby for me.”

What fucking baby?

“No, no that’s all,” his teacher said. “Thank you for your time, Mr Craft.”

Tommy walked out of that parents evening with more trauma than what he came in with—according to Phil, that is.

The moment both the car doors shut, laughter and cackling filled the car.

“Did you see the look on her face—?” Phil cut himself off with a wheeze.

“Holy shit, Philza Minecraft, that was the best thing to ever happen,” Tommy said, his lungs hurting. “I think that parent’s evening went quite well. Well, not for my biological parents at least.”

That sent Phil onto another wheeze until he couldn’t breathe.

Tommy allowed himself this, he deserved to laugh his heart out and end this horrible day with finding humour in lying to your least favourite teacher and putting unnecessary guilt onto their shoulders. He needed this.

Chapter 17

“Look, Tommy, as much as I appreciate these sessions, I don’t think you complaining about the new Minecraft update, that your own foster father coded, is what you really want to talk about today,” Puffy said.

Tommy was sat on a beanbag next to her desk with a bowl of salted popcorn in his lap. According to Puffy, a major part of conversational model therapy was providing a warm and secure environment, so she bought a red beanbag for him off Amazon. He brought the popcorn with him (he found it in the back of Wilbur’s car and his slight immortality would protect him from out of date snacks).

“Puffy, all I want to talk about is the 1.17 update, it’s a good therapy subject. Like, why did they split the caves and cliffs into two parts? It should’ve been one big update,” Tommy explained, throwing another piece of popcorn into his mouth.

His therapist quirked an eyebrow at him. “What did I tell you about lying?”

Tommy huffed. “That it’s not beneficial for either of us and I’m just fucking myself over even more if I do.”

“I didn’t use that exact phrasing but yeah I like that answer,” Puffy said, noting something onto her computer with a smile. “But seriously, what’s bothering you?”

Tommy wished he didn’t tell Puffy he preferred it when she pushed him for answers. Although he liked it in the beginning when she clarified that he had a choice to answer her questions, he knew that if he wasn’t forced into a certain direction, this entire therapy idea wouldn’t help him. He’d just end up going in circles.

He ate a few more pieces of popcorn and propped himself forward. “I’m having issues with my foster brother. The one who’s also having therapy.”

“Wilbur,” Puffy supplied and Tommy nodded.

“I could use some advice on it now that you’re diverting me from Minecraft. To be honest though, I can talk more about how the Warden is technically a mini-boss and not an actual boss because—”

“Tommy,” Puffy interrupted, still amused by his enthusiasm about the video game, though she suspected it was just him trying to cover up his anxiety over the new topic. “Before I give you advice, I need some context. What did Wilbur do?”

Tommy hummed to himself. What did Wilbur do? *This* Wilbur did nothing to Tommy, besides make this entire conflict even worse. He hated how Wilbur spoke to him, expecting Tommy to banter back with the same energy as he usually did. The hurt that flashed in the elder’s eyes pained him every single time and he didn’t know what to do.

“It’s not about what Wilbur did, it’s more... what he represents me,” Tommy decided on as he fiddled with his hands. “I can’t help but make that comparison.”

“Did it bother you before or is this a sudden thing?”

“A dream made the similarity apparent,” Tommy confided, bitter. He peered at the office walls, the striped curtains looked too similar to the apartment complex Estella and her family lived in. His leg bounced on his feet, nerves gnawed at him. He hadn’t had a Dream visit since that; he theorised that the God was purposely giving him a break.

“Tommy, you with me?” his eyes snapped forward, he pressed his hand down on his leg, stopping it from bouncing. Puffy smiled kindly at him.

“Yeah, I’m here. Just... just got lost for a moment.”

“Would you say what we’re dealing with here are the consequences in you relaying your dreams to your real life?” Tommy frowned, confused. “Is the problem rooted with you comparing your dreams to reality? Perhaps a difficulty distinguishing between the two?”

He shook his head. “No, Puffy, believe me, it’s real. The resemblances between Wilbur and *him* are there, it’s real.” He picked at the scabs on his palm, a weight compressed against his chest. “And I can’t stop comparing what I dream to what’s happened or happening in my life because it’s not fake.”

“I believe you,” she reassured, calming his rapid heartbeat. “I believe you Tommy, my theory was wrong.”

He nodded; his throat dry.

“What about we approach this another way?” she suggested, her voice lighter. “What are the differences between Wilbur and the person he represents to you?”

“I mean, they both are men with brown hair and brown eyes, very kickable faces,” he chuckled to himself and Puffy’s face brightens. He paused and bit on his cheek. “Their smiles are different though. Wilbur’s is more open with his intentions, he smiles at you because he’s expressing himself, not because he wishes to lure you into a certain emotion that he *wants* you to feel.”

“Is the other man more calculating then?”

Tommy’s breath hitched. His brother during the L’Manberg era, now that he looks back on it, was very calculating with how he acted and presented himself. There was never a moment Tommy doubted a word he said or even desired to go against him. And if that moment did occur, his brother’s steel words and heavy bearings would anchor him back to his place, by his big brother’s side, as docile and susceptible as ever.

“Yeah,” he exhaled. “He was calculating... and more charismatic. Wilbur’s awkward as fuck, and he does things for others without expecting people to do something in return for him.”

“So it’s more in their personality where it differs,” Puffy inquired. Tommy nodded in agreement. “Is there any way we can transfer these differences so when you look at Wilbur you don’t see the other man?”

Tommy didn’t know. It was hard to even look at Wilbur anymore.

“What if over the time before our next session, you write down some positive memories you have of Wilbur, something to think about as soon as he comes to your head, rather than the comparison and resemblance to the other man?” Puffy said, typing as she spoke. “Do you think that would help?”

“Maybe in theory,” Tommy answered. “I don’t have that much control over my thoughts.”

Puffy chuckled lightly. “Your impulsiveness is evident enough of that.” He grinned at her. “Try it for me. List some Wilbur memories that are important to you for the next time I see you.”

“You’ve given me homework,” he complained, half-heartedly. “But fine, I’ll do it.”

He walked into the reception after his session, which wasn’t busy since it was Saturday at seven o’clock in the evening. He sat down and debated leaving without Wilbur, but the man exiting the lift door disturbed his idea.

“You alright?” Wilbur asked as he moved to put his arm around Tommy. He bit on his lip to stop himself from grimacing at the touch.

“Yep. I got homework from Puffy,” he said, his shoulders tense and jaw clenched.

“Lucky, my therapist just shitted on me for an hour straight,” Wilbur laughed humourlessly and looked downwards, probably waiting for him to quip back with something, but Tommy stayed silent. “Let’s walk to the park, it’s just around the corner.”

He continued his silence, guilt eating him up inside. He knew Wilbur expected him to make fun of him, but he couldn’t. He had been trying all week to act normally with him and it worked when Phil or Techno was there. Yet, the second the two were alone, his façade crumbled.

They sat on a bench underneath a tree. The gusts of wind entertained the rigid silence between them. Tommy took his phone out of his pocket and clicked on the most recent contact.

Moth:

Tommy: hello best friend <3 pls respond ahah, seriously respond.

Clementine: hello best friend :D what do you want

Tommy: sorry I am using you to get out of an awkward convo with my foster brother. I know it's your birthday but pls save me holy shit.

Clementine: at least you're self-aware of how you're exploiting our friendship

Tommy: stfu

Clementine: rude.

Lemme send pics of my pets and you have to judge them all.

Type a lot so it looks like a serious conversation.

Tommy: deal, ty clem.

After a couple of minutes of Tommy rapidly typing, Wilbur sighed from beside him and snatched the phone out of his hands.

"What did I do, Tommy?" Wilbur asked, his tone vulnerable, yearning for an answer, for *anything*. "It's different between us and I don't know what happened."

Tommy grabbed his phone back and held it in his hand for comfort. "I can't explain it to you yet. Or if I can at all."

"Is it my fault?" Wilbur's face ached with remorse, ashamed of a deed he wasn't aware he committed.

A pit boiled deep in Tommy's stomach, frustration pulsed beneath his skin. "I don't know."

"You don't know?" Wilbur repeated.

"I don't know!" he spat out. "Can we stop talking about this? Please?"

Wilbur silently fumed but dropped it.

"You can't avoid this though," Wilbur said. "We're talking about this later."

Tommy gulped, he could sense the shouting match and eventual mental breakdown from miles away. "Sorry, I'm busy later," he blurted out.

"Busy doing what?" Wilbur asked, sceptical.

He glanced down at his phone and Clementine was still sending pictures of her pets. "It's Clementine's birthday and she's having a party at her house."

Technically, that wasn't a lie. She had invited him on Friday but he declined since Tommy and parties were not a safe mix, especially since this was *Clementine*, the person known for having a severe deprivation of adult and parental supervision.

“Has Dad said you’re allowed to go?”

“Nope, but he owes me.” Tommy could easily use the whole ‘you’re making me fake being anxious when planes are brought up in my history classes because of you’ to his advantage. “Anyway, I have to go to Tubbo’s. Bye.”

He stood up from the bench but Wilbur’s sudden grip on his arm stopped him from leaving. The grip wasn’t even that harsh, but Tommy felt trapped. He tried to push him off, yet Wilbur wouldn’t budge.

“Let go of me,” he continued to shove Wilbur off him.

“I can’t fucking believe you,” Wilbur scoffed under his breath and let go.

Tommy staggered on his feet and walked away. He looked back once to see Wilbur staring at him, his face furrowed with defeat. His pacing quickened.

He retrieved Clementine’s present and some clothes from his house before texting Phil about the party and going to Tubbo’s house. He knew Ranboo was already there and it wouldn’t be *that* hard to convince them both to come to Clementine’s party with him.

“Fuck off, I’m not coming,” Tubbo said as soon as Tommy brought it up when he entered his bedroom.

“Uh, I have maths homework due on Monday,” Ranboo added.

“Too fucking bad, you’re both coming,” Tommy declared as he pulled out his clothes from the bag.

“Tommy I don’t think you understand, I’m not extroverted and Ranboo is quirky.”

Ranboo ignored the insult. “Will there be alcohol there?”

“Dude, it’s Clementine.”

“Nope, I’m staying here,” Ranboo shot back, holding his arms up in surrender.

“Guys please, just come with me,” he pouted at them. “I need you guys.”

“This is manipulation and it’s working on Ranboo,” Tubbo groaned and shoved Ranboo, who was staring down at Tommy as if he was a wounded puppy. “For fuck’s sake.”

“It’s the eyes, man! I can’t help it,” Ranboo exclaimed as Tommy continued to pout at them.

Tubbo sighed loudly, “Fine, fine, we’re coming. But you owe us.”

“Thanks lads,” Tommy beamed at them both.

It didn’t take long for the boys to get ready, though if you asked Tommy, Ranboo took the longest. The taller one did look the most dripped out, he managed to make a Hawaiian t-shirt look fashionable and matched his facemask to his shirt underneath, whilst Tubbo was dressed like a Pixar character (it suited him).

During the Uber drive to Clementine’s house—she lived in the richer part of Snowchester, aka the place Phil *should* be living in—Tubbo glared at Tommy the entire time. Yet, when they got there, it was more of a mansion than a house. Tommy was glad Phil chose to live a humbler lifestyle. Even from the outside, you could tell there were too many rooms built inside there, with how many windows you could see. The entire house looked like Tory propaganda from the 1960s under Prime Minister Macmillan. His catchphrase of ‘never had it so good’ very much applied to this.

“Tommy, what the fuck have you got us into?” Tubbo demanded, gaping at the house.

“Let’s have some fun, boys.” Tommy dragged Tubbo by his arm and Ranboo reluctantly followed them.

“You can’t tell under my sunglasses, but I’m glaring at you too, Tommy,” Ranboo said as he pushed open the already ajar door.

The inside of the house was grander than the outside. Banners and balloons with Clementine’s name were stuck on the walls. There was a table full of food right next to the drinks table, which had substances on it that Tommy’s stomach dropped at. Okay, maybe going to a party that was obviously going to have alcohol in when your Sisyphus family had a history of alcoholism and drug addiction was not a good idea. But Tommy never did think over things properly.

Music that sounded like one of Wilbur’s popular Spotify playlists was playing. The reminder seemed to balance the fear growing inside him. *That* was the reason he was here (partly for Clementine as well), but the main reason he impulsively decided to come was directed to wanting to forget all his problems for just one night. He didn’t want to feel burdened by memories and Wilbur; he just wanted to have fun and be a normal teenager for once.

And if that meant disregarding the pleadings in his head to *not* do what he was about to do, then so be it.

He made his way towards the drinks table and poured himself *something* into a red cup and downed it without hesitation. It burned his throat and honestly, he could’ve thrown up on the spot. Ranboo reached forward and took the now empty cup out of his hands; Tubbo gawked at him, shocked.

“Dude, what the hell? You don’t down whiskey,” Ranboo said, screwing the cap back onto the Jack Daniels bottle and moving it far away from Tommy. “And you didn’t even mix it with Coke or something.”

“Well, I’ve learnt my lesson,” Tommy gasped, his throat sore and mind buffering—every time he breathed out and smelled the tinge of alcohol, a wisp of his Sisyphus life flashed in front of him. Yeah, he may have fucked up here.

“This night is going to be eventful, isn’t it?” Tubbo said, dread in his voice. “Oh hey, Clementine has a Wii. We’re playing.”

Well, that was a quick mood change.

Speaking of Clementine, she noticed them downstairs and ran towards them. She had a crown on her head and glitter strands in her hair.

“Tommy!” she threw her arms around him and he hugged her back. “You didn’t tell me you were coming.”

“Surprise,” he smiled, his tongue still burning. “I also brought these two.”

“Hello!” Clementine said, waving at Tubbo and Ranboo. “You guys don’t seem like the people to go to parties.”

“We play Minecraft,” Tubbo answered as if that explained it (which it did).

“Ah, I’m more of a Sims type person,” Clementine said. “Just try to have fun, there’s non-alcoholic stuff too. Raid my fridge if you want.”

“I mean, I play Sims as well,” Ranboo inputted.

“But do you play modded Sims?” she asked and Ranboo shook his head. “Now, *that* is the difference between us.”

She giggled and faced Tommy again. “I’m glad you’re here.”

“I bought your present.” He took the gift bag from Ranboo and gave it to her. She opened it and cuddled the moth plushie to her chest. “You remind me of a moth, so here.”

“I don’t know if I should be offended or not.” She grinned teasingly.

“A beautiful, beautiful moth.”

“Aww, thank you.”

Tubbo dragged Ranboo towards the Wii and Tommy turned back to Clementine. “How did your parent’s allow you all this?”

“They’re currently in America trying to invest in NFTs,” she explained, trying to keep the smile on her face as she spoke. It was probably a bad time to bring up her parents, especially at her birthday party.

“That sounds like a sexual disease,” Tommy shot back.

“It’s capitalism in a nutshell.”

“So I’m correct,” he said and she laughed.

“Does the reason you came here have anything to do with our text messages earlier?”

His mouth thinned into a hard line. “Pretty much.”

“Well, you have fun with your friends tonight,” she ordered, beaming at him. But the carefree energy she exhibited dropped when she looked behind Tommy. “Oh, my girlfriend is going to injure herself, bye.”

Tommy watched as Clementine pulled Vitalia from where she was swinging on the top bannister of the staircase. Ignoring all *that*, he walked towards Tubbo and Ranboo, who were creating their Mii characters on the TV screen. He sat down on the sofa closest to the snacks on the coffee table as he tried to feel his tongue again (Ranboo was right, downing whiskey was not a good decision).

He grabbed the bowl of gummy bears from the table and ate them; they tasted weird but he’d never had gummy bears before.

When Tubbo got bored of the Mii Party minigames, he managed to hook up the VR headset he found behind the TV to the screen and started playing Beat Saber. As Tubbo gave himself a headache with the game, Tommy finished the bowl of gummy bears, leaning into Ranboo’s side. The other boy was currently trying to negotiate with the girl next to him, who was drinking vodka straight from the bottle as if it was water. He managed to take it off her, though she kept clarifying that she was fine because she was Slavic.

Either way, Tommy now had the vodka bottle, which made Ranboo sigh himself into oblivion.

“I am babysitting. I hate it here,” Ranboo complained, narrowing his eyes at Tommy, who was holding the bottle as if it was a small child.

“Aren’t you having fun?” Tommy asked, his eyes kept making the room appear a different shade every time he blinked (he didn’t know if that was a side effect of the whisky or because of the flashing lights in the living room—probably both).

“Well, Tommy, I am an introvert who isn’t interested in drinking alcohol at a party.”

“Fun!”

Ranboo face-palmed. “Maybe for you.”

“Okay, how can I make this fun for you?”

“I kinda wanna force Tubbo to play a horror game.”

“Fuck off Boo, we’re not doing that!” Tubbo shouted as he played his VR game. He was close to knocking into the wall, but neither Tommy nor Ranboo moved to stop him. “Ow!”

Tommy stifled his laughter as he caved into Ranboo's side, accidentally spilling the opened vodka onto him. "Oh fuck."

Ranboo jumped up, rushing to pick up the bottle.

"Tommy, just know, that if I did have swearing in my vocabulary, I would use every single one of them right now to describe you."

"Aww, you'd swear for me?"

"No, I'd swear *at* you," Ranboo took napkins from the coffee table to dry himself. "I smell like nail varnish now."

"A good scent," Tommy said as he sniffed him. "No, you smell more like those gummy bears."

Ranboo whacked him. "Stop sniffing me!"

"Sorry, Ranboo." Tommy collapsed onto his side.

"You can make it up to me by helping me add 'Lemon Demon' songs onto this speaker."

"Only if we add a Rick Roll in the queue as well," Tommy said, his blue eyes glinting. "Can we play card games as well?"

"Sure."

As hours passed by, Tommy felt worse. He didn't feel in control of his body, or his thoughts for that matter, which was kind of a good thing since no negativity or reminders came to his mind. No comparisons to his past mother, no guilt nor fear towards Wilbur, nothing. But he was angry (Tubbo kept making him pick up cards in Uno), though it passed when Tubbo apologised and patted him on the head.

Now the three were in the garden, both Ranboo and Tubbo were sharing a lounge bed around the pool. Ranboo was on his seventh Capri Sun and Tubbo sipped on some random drink Tommy gave him from the kitchen. Tommy laid on a mat on the ground—he had attempted to stand up and fell, so he just stayed there. Apparently, the entire bowl of gummy bears he ate was soaked in vodka. He was an idiot.

He gazed up at the sky, trying to distinguish star constellations, and couldn't spot the one he usually saw when he was at the bench by the seawall, the crown-shaped one.

"What do you guys want to do after school?" Ranboo suddenly asked; he was in a philosophical mood.

"Infiltrate the US government and find out what Area 54 really is," Tubbo said. "Or work in NASA. Either's fine."

Tommy nodded, that was a perfectly reasonable occupation goal, whilst Ranboo stuttered out a response, “Why would you want to infiltrate the American government?”

“Why *wouldn't* you?”

“Fair enough.”

“What about you, then?”

“Stand-up comedian,” Ranboo answered.

“Come on then, big man, do some stand-up for us,” Tommy said, resting on his elbow.

Ranboo simply just stood up, then sat back down.

“If I had tomatoes right now, I’d throw them at you,” Tubbo groaned over Tommy’s laughter.

“Tommy at least found it funny.”

“He is fucking wasted, everything is funny to him right now,” Tubbo said, gesturing to the boy who was currently cackling on the floor. “Tommy, what about you?”

Tommy paused and struggled to get up but managed to move onto the same lounge bed as the two of them, squeezing in the middle of them. “I want to live off-grid. Make myself a little mud house in a hill, have a little farm, some pets.”

“Okay Bear Grylls.”

“I won’t drink my own urine, fuck off,” Tommy murmured as he nestled into Tubbo’s side.

“Piss off.” Tubbo pushed him more into Ranboo. “You are clingy.”

“And you are a bitch.” Tommy mumbled, giggling to himself.

“I have another idea for the future though,” Tubbo began. “Ranboo, want to get platonically married for tax benefits?”

“Can we get a cat?” Tubbo nodded. “Then sure.”

“I’ll be in charge of the music at your wedding,” Tommy said.

Ranboo combed his hand through Tommy’s hair. “No thanks, you’d probably play the Avengers theme song as we walk down the aisle.”

“But it would be funny though.”

“It would be funny,” Tubbo agreed and the three laughed.

Warmth rippled through Tommy, he felt at home. He leaned further into Ranboo’s hand and settled his chin on top of Tubbo’s shoulder. His eyes fluttered shut, content.

“I don’t want to die on you guys,” he whispered.

“...what?”

“I think this is the happiest I’ve ever been and I don’t want to go,” he continued, letting the sweet fuzziness in his head and heart overwhelm him.

“You aren’t going anywhere, what are you talking about?” Ranboo’s arm around him tensed.

“No, no, it’s fine.” A small hand rested on his cheek. “I’ve accepted it, but still.”

“Tom, you’re not going to die,” Tubbo muttered.

He opened his eyes and Tubbo stared back, his eyebrows creased with concern. Tommy smiled sadly at his friend. “I am.”

Tubbo wrapped his arms around him, encasing him in a tight hug. “Shut the fuck up, you’re drunk and talking shit.”

“But—”

“Shut up,” Tubbo hissed.

Tommy sighed and let his body sag against them. Ranboo resumed stroking his hair and Tubbo slotted his head in Tommy’s neck. “Don’t leave me.”

“We won’t,” Ranboo whispered, softly. “We won’t.”

Tommy was silent in the Uber home, half draped across Ranboo’s lap. Phil had been texting him on their way back, but every time he looked down at his phone screen, the letters mushed together and his eyes stung. Ranboo had to be the one to text back.

The moment Phil opened the door, his mouth fell open. When he gave Tommy permission (well, more like was forced into permitting him) to go to this party, he didn’t expect *this*. They all looked like a mess. Ranboo stunk of alcohol because of how Tommy split it on him, Tubbo had a pink cowboy hat on his head—none of them knew where he got it from—and Tommy could barely stand up on his own.

“What the fuck?” Phil spluttered out, ushering the boys inside.

“For legal reasons, I did not drink. Though, my clothes did,” Ranboo said as he helped Tommy stand up straight.

Wilbur frowned at the trio from where he sat on the dinner table with a bowl of pasta. “What happened to you three?”

“Tommy used me as a drink coaster,” Ranboo explained.

“He is also the cause of all our current problems,” Tubbo added on.

“Well, I see that,” Wilbur said.

“Shut up, shed boy,” Tommy grumbled quietly, his arms gripping onto Ranboo.

“Tommy, I thought I told you that one of the rules in this house is no illegal shit,” Phil said.

“You’re gonna go dad mode on me, aren’t you?”

“Yep, when you’re sober in the morning,” Phil confirmed. “Will, could you drive Tubbo and Ranboo home for me?”

Both boys said their goodbyes to Tommy, though he barely noticed them, as his head was practically vibrating out of his skull.

Phil placed a water bottle in Tommy’s hands and directed him towards the longest sofa in the living room. He laid down next to the boy, worry in his eyes, as Tommy struggled to move his body as he intended it to.

“This isn’t normal behaviour from you, Tommy,” Phil said quietly, cradling him to his side.

“I think normal has gone out the window,” he replied, his words slightly slurred as his head drooped.

“What happened?” Phil asked. “You’ve been acting weird with Wilbur, and now you pull this.”

Tommy hummed, burying himself deeper into the sofa.

“I’m worried about you.”

“You shouldn’t be,” he muttered.

“My fifteen-year-old son is drunk, I should be worried.” Tommy blinked up at him, smiling at the affection in his tone.

“I’m your son?”

“Of course you are, you little shit.” Phil kissed the top of his head. “Now, what’s wrong?”

Tommy rubbed at his eyes, words flowed into his head at a rapid pace. “I can’t go back to normal. He killed Estella and so many other people.”

“What?”

He couldn't stop the words from leaving his mouth. "Wilbur, he killed her. She's gone and it's all his fault. He murdered her and everyone in that building. And he- he's the reason I died in the first place."

"Tommy, you're not making any sense," Phil whispered, holding onto his shoulder.

"I didn't want to go to war, Phil, I really didn't... I was a fucking kid and he was supposed to protect me and I—" he cut himself off, his breath hitching.

"Did you dream this? Is this the nightmare you had that Techno was telling me about?"

"No! No, it's real and..." he shoved his head into Phil's chest and let the tears finally fall. "I can't do this anymore."

"Shh, it's okay. You're drunk, it's alright." Phil rubbed Tommy's back as he sobbed, his chest spiking in pain and head blaring. "Drink some water and lay down. You'll sleep on here tonight with me, okay?"

Tommy's body slacked with no energy, the fight in him dissolving. He couldn't do this any longer. He wanted this home to stay, to keep these people by his side for once.

A pillow was pushed under his head, his tears dampening the fabric. He clutched onto Phil's hand, not letting the man go.

"I don't want to be alone anymore," he whimpered. Phil tightened his hold on him.

"You're not alone," the man kept repeating these words until the tears dried on Tommy's face and his breathing calmed.

The front door opened and Tommy turned his face from the pillow, his vision blurred.

"Will, leave him, he probably doesn't understand what's going on," Phil said lowly and someone knelt in front of him.

"What did I do?" the voice asked, with timid urgency and desperation. Wilbur.

"*You* didn't do anything," Tommy slurred, squeezing Phil's hand. He raised his shaking hand to prod at Wilbur's chest, at his heart. "But *he* did."

"I don't know what you mean, Toms—"

"I can't look at you the same way," he murmured, his lips numb. He blinked until his vision cleared; Wilbur's face was close to his.

He tried to remember how Wilbur sang him to sleep with that stupid song about the internet ruining him; Wilbur's shock when Tommy gave him the album cover art for Christmas; the hug they had that he wished never ended; Wilbur stealing the crusts from his Domino's Pizza since he never ate them; Wilbur flipping him off at any opportunity whenever they crossed paths at school; the heat of Wilbur tucked into his side as they sat on the graveyard bench that one cold night.

He cupped Wilbur's face and hoped to see something other than a cold-hearted murderer. But he couldn't.

"I'm so fucking sorry." The tears returned and he broke.

"How can I change this?" Wilbur put his hand over Tommy's, pressing it more into his face. "Please. I want my little brother back."

He fell forward into Wilbur's arms, sobs wrenching from his heart. He wished to kindle in the warmth he once felt but self-loathing and coldness pricked at his skin. Despising every thought that crossed his mind, he cried into his brother's shoulder.

"Please don't remember," he wept, clinging to the soul he was supposed to detest. "Don't remember being him."

Wilbur kissed his forehead. "I love you, okay?"

More tears streamed down his face. "I love you too," he cried, hating the honest words.

Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Wilbur didn't expect to wake up on the sofa with Tommy, asleep and tucked under his chin. But the daunting sight of Techno with a bucket of water in his hands and Phil watching with a bowl of porridge made the wake-up call more interesting—and threatening.

“Technoblade, if you spill that shit over us, I’m cancelling your sponsorship of that polar bear,” Wilbur muttered loudly as he covered the blanket over Tommy’s back and cupped his hand across the back of the boy’s neck.

“Don’t threaten Steve,” Techno said, stepping forward with the bucket. “And it’s tradition anyway.”

Wilbur glared at him; Techno had a running streak of pouring water on people to wake them up when they came home drunk, with his first victim being Wilbur himself, aged sixteen.

“Dad, take the bucket off him or I’m calling Childline,” Wilbur tempted, holding Tommy closer to his side. As much as he wanted Tommy to wake up cussing out Techno, it was probably not the best time for this to happen.

“Childline? Really?” Phil said, shovelling more porridge into his mouth.

“Try me,” he responded with slitted eyes. Techno groaned and put the bucket on the coffee table, probably annoyed that he couldn’t add another tally onto the whiteboard in his room (yes, the bastard had a whiteboard to count this).

“Good,” Wilbur said. He would’ve flipped Techno off but Tommy moved a little in his sleep, burying his face into Wilbur’s chest. Tommy looked even younger when asleep with no creases on his forehead, no crinkled nose nor exasperation that dulled his bright eyes. The younger boy seemed at peace, softer even—not that Wilbur would voice any of these thoughts (he’d rather die).

A smile curled onto his lips and he threaded his fingers through the blonde’s hair, gently detangling the knots.

“Treasure this moment Wilbur, he’s been acting weird with you all week,” Techno said.

Wilbur fumed at the reminder. He didn’t know what he did, well *now* he knew but it didn’t make sense. Tommy’s drunken words only added to his confusion. Ever since Tommy woke up from that nightmare and his screaming extended at the sight of him, guilt bled through him. Guilt for the unknown, for what he must’ve done to get such a reaction from someone he viewed as a younger brother.

If Tommy told him what he did without sounding fucking insane, then the darkness encasing his heart wouldn't seethe every time the boy flinched away from him, avoided his eyes and looked at Wilbur as if someone else stood in his place.

Not knowing what he did to hurt a person he loved was more painful than Wilbur would've liked to admit.

Tommy leaned into his hand, grunting under his breath. Chuckling, Wilbur resumed stroking his hair and Tommy hummed, content.

"He doesn't look at me the same way as before and I don't know what I did," he whispered, the smile on his face fading.

"He's just getting his dreams mixed up with real life, Will. He told me you were a murderer and something about a war," Phil said and Techno fidgeted from where he sat.

"Let him figure it out himself, he'll probably talk to Niki or someone about it," Techno advised, his eyes locked onto Tommy.

Wilbur frowned. "Why Niki?"

"They're friends, are they not?" Techno stated, his face and voice devoid of emotion. "Just don't pressure him into giving you answers."

"How can he *not* have answers though? There must be a reason for why he's suddenly acting like this to me," Wilbur rebutted, bitter.

"The brain doesn't behave logically, especially if it's Tommy," Techno replied. "As I said, let him do this by himself."

Wilbur swallowed down the possessiveness that crept over him, like the shadow that clung to the boy the second he appeared on their doorstep. There was something about Tommy that just bloomed yellow roses in Wilbur's chest the moment he entered the room.

He felt like he recognised Tommy from *somewhere* but he could never place it. Maybe it was just the part of him that always wanted a little brother, which no longer remained dormant the second Tommy Idelle stormed into his life and changed it for the better. He didn't even know how Tommy broke down his walls so quickly, made him open up about his mother's death and finally accept therapy again after the shitfest that occurred with the year twelve school counsellor.

Tommy crumbled down those walls and let the sun shine through the cracks. But then he built up his own walls, casing Wilbur off with no warning. The sunshine wasn't as warm without Tommy by his side.

"I just want him back," he proclaimed, wishing that Tommy was awake to hear his honest words.

"You'll get him back," Techno reassured, patting him on the shoulder like he usually did to provide comfort. "One day, you will."

Wilbur sighed and closed his eyes, his face resting on top of Tommy's head. He willed himself to sleep, hoping that the forgetful ghost he occasionally saw in his dreams wouldn't be crying this time (though, he would appreciate some blue right now).

In Tommy's superior and completely factually correct opinion, Phil was overreacting. Sure it was worrying and broke the house rules for him to get blackout drunk at the small age of fifteen, but it was funny. Well, no actually, it was the opposite to that. From the muddled flashes he remembered from Clementine's party, he had confessed his fear of dying to his best friends, had *another* breakdown over Wilbur and may have used Clementine's staircase as a slippery slide at one point—it explained the bruises down his back.

Yet, Phil's punishment for his mild drinking (correction: heavy drinking) wasn't justified. He knew his human rights and *this* breached all of them.

After he had showered and taken enough paracetamols for his headache to finally die down, Phil forced him to sit through the longest lecture he had ever experienced. He had been threatened in various ways throughout his many lives, but an angry Phil Craft took the cake on this one. With the disappointment in his face, the stern look in his eyes and the fucking finger-pointing, it was torture.

Because of his so-called 'reckless and dog-shit behaviour', his curfew was reduced by many hours; he was banned from *ever* going to Clementine's house again; he had to text Phil every couple of hours if he went out, assuring the man that he wasn't doing any illegal substances or activities; and on top of that, he was on bin duty. He was responsible for emptying and recycling every single bin in the household (even Wilbur's—which was a bottomless pit of Amazon boxes, eBay packages and empty water bottles). Phil also made Tommy hug him for the sake of the older man's mental health, but that part of the punishment wasn't so bad. Even when Phil was pissed, he still gave good hugs.

Yet, the worst punishment was having to make everyone sandwiches for lunchtime, using his expert recipe which only *he* should enjoy eating, not the rest of the household.

The three sat on their designated seats at the dinner table, happily enjoying their meals as Tommy glared at each one of them with every bite of their sandwich they took. It was painful to watch.

"So, let's get this straight, when I came home drunk, I had to do *all* the chores, my computer was taken away from me and I couldn't do anything at the weekends for a month. But, when Tommy does it, he just has to empty my bin." Wilbur had been complaining for the past ten minutes, much to Phil's dismay.

"Wilbur, I had to pick you up from the police station for attempted robbery. I think these are two different situations," Phil said, pinching the bridge of his nose.

“You robbed someone when drunk?” Tommy gasped; he didn’t think Wilbur had that in him.

“No!” Wilbur exclaimed. “This random lady took my skateboard away from me and I don’t even know why she was at the park that late—”

“It was her son’s skateboard that he left at the park by accident, which you stole and claimed yours,” Phil huffed, fed up with his son.

Wilbur scowled at him. “Not my problem he left it there.”

“That mother still glares at me whenever I see her in public because of you.”

“Just say that Tommy’s the favourite, you coward.”

“Tommy is the favourite,” Techno said, agreeing. Tommy grinned, smug.

“Wipe that smile off your face or I’ll take away your Tubbo time,” Phil scolded, his tone harsh despite the amusement in his face.

Tommy gaped at him. “No, you can’t do that, that’s illegal.”

“And Ranboo time.”

“Oh, that one’s fine.”

“Now that’s just cruel,” Phil muttered, shaking his head.

“No, do you know what’s cruel?” Techno asked as he faced Tommy, who didn’t like the glint in the other’s eyes. “We’re having MCC practice later today.”

“Please, no. I have school tomorrow, I’m going to wake up with no bones,” he begged. He could practically feel the aches that he would have later this evening.

“A boneless Monday,” Wilbur added.

“Exactly!” Tommy said. “Wait, what does that even mean—?”

“Well, you boys have fun. I need to go food shopping,” Phil interrupted as if he could already sense the argument that would occur between the three of them.

“Can you buy some rope from Wickes? I want to climb a building and jump right off it after today,” Tommy asked.

“I’ll fund the purchase,” Wilbur offered, narrowly avoiding the banana Tommy threw at him in retaliation.

“Add another mile onto Wilbur’s run for me, Tech,” Phil said, prompting Wilbur to slam his head on the table, mixing bread crumbs in his hair.

It took an hour for Techno to convince Tommy and Wilbur to stop chasing him around the house as they shouted various threats and creative insults, then another hour for them all to get out of the house in sports clothing.

On the drive to the football field, Techno had decided to torment Tommy even further by explaining some of the MCC minigames in English literature metaphors—he had never read ‘The Great Gatsby’ so he had no idea what relevance it had to Sands of Time (something about how you couldn’t fight against the inevitability).

Techno sat down on the bleacher benches. “We can’t do Hole in the Wall since we don’t have the equipment, so Parkour Tag and Ace Race practice it is.”

Wilbur’s mood fouled at the mere mention of *that* minigame. “Ace Race? Are you fucking kidding me?”

“Don’t make me add another mile to your course,” Techno threatened, not bothered by Wilbur’s tantrum as he handed the two of them Velcro tags that they tucked into the back of their shorts.

“Let me die. Just kill me,” Wilbur groaned, causing Tommy to laugh.

“You’re being dramatic,” Techno said. “Now, go chase each other.”

Tommy’s laughter quickly faded as he did not have fun being hunted by a six-foot-five madman. He was certain that tackling the target deep into the mud wasn’t allowed in the game. But that didn’t stop Wilbur from doing it several times.

The light-heartedness in the air, and also the adrenaline flowing through him, ceased the nerves Tommy usually had around Wilbur ever since the nightmare. Perhaps it had something to do with the moment he had with the man last night. All he remembered was crying into Wilbur’s arms, saying some sappy shit and falling asleep cuddled into his side—something Techno would probably call ‘cringe’.

Regardless, *those* thoughts weren’t things hurdling through his head, especially during MCC practice where every muscle in his body underwent a cycle of abuse and pain until Techno graciously granted him a water break.

Tommy laid down on the bleacher, staring at Techno, who was amused by Wilbur in the distance as he attempted to climb a tree that was *not* meant to be climbed on. Yet, Techno's shoulders were tense and his fingernails were red.

“You doing alright?” Tommy asked as he downed his water bottle.

Techno squeezed the body of the water bottle, grinning as Tommy choked on the high pressure. “Y’know, as the responsible adult with a foster sibling who came home blasted last night, I should be asking you that.”

Tommy spat the water on the grass, glaring at him. “Why’d the fuck you do that?”

“Just be glad Wilbur stopped me from waking you up with cold water. If you didn’t have a breakdown and some emotional moment with him, I bet he would’ve let me do it,” Techno said.

“I am so sorry that I’m not in control of how I feel,” Tommy quipped.

“Thank you.”

Tommy whacked his shoulder. “Do you have no empathy?” Techno narrowed his eyes. “Actually, no, don’t answer that.”

“To answer your initial question, I’m fine,” Techno said, his voice betrayed his confident words. “Well, MCC stresses me out, even though I’m not a contestant anymore.”

“Is that the only thing stressing you out?” Tommy’s eyes glanced down at Techno’s bitten fingernails, making the other cover his hands.

“I have a fencing tournament soon. It’s in two weeks, at the beginning of April,” he finally said after a small pause.

“Ah, the Blade, undefeated champion,” Tommy repeated the things he heard from the guys at fencing whenever Techno beat him in a match. It seemed that Techno had created a reputation for himself in this field.

“Yep,” he sighed, dispirited.

Tommy frowned at his tone, but stayed silent for once, allowing the quiet to fester so Techno could gather his thoughts or even reach a decision about whether he wanted to talk about it with him.

When it became apparent that Techno wouldn’t continue, Tommy said, “I’m worried about my maths mock exam.” He hoped that sharing one of his worries would make it easier for Techno to do the same. “I can’t do simultaneous equations to save my life.”

Techno’s eyebrows furrowed. “But those questions are so easy.”

“No, they aren’t! They put so many words in it and give the question its own lore. It confuses me,” Tommy said, waving his hands as he spoke. “I just want to know what it’s asking me to do, and not the entire backstory of why Stephanie has twelve blue t-shirts to begin with.”

Techno laughed lightly before looking forward again. “I used to do fencing for fun with Wilbur at some point. But then I progressed too far and Wilbur didn’t like going against me—I think I bruised his ego.” He exhaled sharply. “When I started the tournaments and each win created a flawless streak, it wasn’t just a hobby anymore and losing wasn’t an option.”

“Sounds like you have a lot of pressure on your shoulders,” Tommy said, slightly relating. Though, Tommy had a streak of losing, of failing to guess his myth instead of winning. Every incorrect answer added another weight to the force compressing against his chest.

“Bingo.”

Tommy sat up. “How can we make it so you enjoy it again?”

“We?”

“You heard me, dickhead.”

“Well, it would be more fun if you weren’t involved,” Techno joked.

Tommy shoved at his shoulder, trying to push him off the bench but Techno didn’t budge. “I hate you.”

Techno chuckled.

“No, I’m being serious. I try to be nice and this is how you repay me? This is exploitation, manipulation, banter is bullying—”

“You make it fun, Tommy. Don’t worry about me,” Techno said, interrupting his rant.

A smile broke out on Tommy’s face. “I make everything fun, don’t try to distract me with flattery.”

“Alright, that’s the last time I say anything nice to you,” Techno muttered. “Go back to training and tell Wilbur to stop assaulting that tree, it’s embarrassing.”

Reluctantly, Tommy stood up and squinted at the sight of Wilbur kicking the shit out of the tree stump at the end of the field. “I feel bad that you share a last name with him.”

“I’ll use those very words against you someday,” Techno shot back.

Tommy scowled, ignoring the warmth he felt at the implication, even if it was a joke (was it a joke?). Nevertheless, he ran towards Wilbur, already thinking of insults to shout at him as he got closer.

The moment Tommy’s head hit the pillow when he got home, he fell asleep. Techno’s training had burned him out *that* much. However, the adrenaline that had been running through him for the past couple of hours returned as the void appeared in front of him.

For fuck’s sake.

Ahead of him, Dream sat next to the table with the same board game on it, the Knossos Game.

He rushed forward, anger bursting in him as Dream seemed unbothered by his arrival. The last Dream visit ended with the fucker letting him fall off the ledge of the maze wall and

giving him the existential crisis about his brother.

“You fucking piece of shit! You think you could just play your little Monopoly game and act like the last visit didn’t happen?” he snapped, tempted to knock the board off the table.

Dream continued sorting out the ten playing pieces.

He bit on his cheek in frustration. “Are you even listening to me?”

The God gestured for Tommy to sit down opposite him.

“I’m not playing any more games with you, Zagreus.” At the mention of his actual name, Dream looked at him, his lips twisted into a scowl. “Oh, that got a reaction out of you.”

“Sit down,” Dream ordered with malice.

Tommy did as he said, the tone of the God’s voice awakening his slumbering instincts that developed during exile, shifting him back into that complicit Pavlovian dog, conditioned to whatever pleased Dream. A shiver crept across his back, evoking fear into Tommy as he tried to stop his hand from trembling.

“Play the game,” he continued, the grip he had over Tommy loosening as he handed him the three dice.

As Tommy managed to secure his first piece almost back to the Land of the Living, one good roll away from safety, Dream’s next words caught him off guard.

“Now that I look back on it, I may have overcompensated with your punishment.”

The dice faced black, swallowing Tommy’s piece into the River Styx, into death.

Tommy glared at him, wanting nothing more than to rip the mask off his face and look Dream dead into the eyes, to see what emotion wallowed in them as he spoke such weighted words so casually.

“Overcompensated?” Tommy repeated, his teeth gritted.

“You weren’t supposed to take this long to guess your myth,” Dream explained as he moved another one of his pieces back to the Living. “Like Nihachu and your father, you were supposed to learn from your mistakes throughout your rebirths and finally figure it out.”

Time stopped.

“My dad? My dad—” he pushed back from the table. After all these years, *this* is when Dream told him this, one heartbreaking reveal after another.

The man with piercing blue eyes, a stern grip and shadowing force, his father. The Angel of Death, they called him on the battlefields before he and his brother were born, as he reaped the souls of those who dared to raise their weapons against him. The name returned in full force though, after he spilt his son’s blood on his blade for the world to see.

“My dad’s cursed as well?” Tommy spluttered, the game forgotten about. He couldn’t think straight.

“*Was* cursed, yes.” Dream corrected. “He figured it out.”

“Who... who was he? In his first life?”

Tommy craved to know what drove his father in that life, the reason why he neglected his sons and left the eldest to do the dreadful job for him. For years, he pondered why arrogance and hubris took away the father he *should* have had.

What myth caused him to be so unlovable?

“Your father was Tantalus.”

With the roll of the God’s dice, it all made sense.

Tantalus. A King, never satisfied with the family he had nor worthy of the respect the Gods had towards him. He exploited Zeus’ hospitality, murdered and cooked his son into a meal that he served to the Olympians just to test their omniscience.

A punishment so *tantalising* followed, forced to stand in a pool of water beneath a low-hanging fruit tree, forbidden to clench his thirst or satisfy his hunger. Eternal denial of fulfilment for not appreciating the greatness you were handed for free in life.

“Did he have a family after he broke his curse?” Tommy whispered as silent tears ran down his face.

“Yes. Yes, he did.”

His father was dead then. He may have died centuries ago, maybe with another family, a wife that wasn’t taken away from him too soon, children he might have loved instead of despised. A life that didn’t disappoint him.

“His lineage still continues to this day. You’re familiar with one of his newest descendants,” Dream said.

And deep down, Tommy knew who he was referring to. Dream really wasn’t lying when he said this foster family was *exciting*.

“Did you choose?” he began, tired of his conversation. “Did you choose the myths in our first lives?”

“I chose them all,” Dream said, proceeding with his round of Knossos.

“I fucking hate you,” he spat. “You cursed every important person in my life, forcing us into a life of tragedy, and for what? What the fuck did we even do to deserve all that?”

“I told you before, with hindsight, I see now I overcompensated,” Dream replied, a heaviness to his voice.

His blurred vision glowered at the Knossos board, at his lost pieces. “Is that all I get from you? Is that the only inkling of an apology I’ll ever get from you?”

“I am sorry, Tommy.”

Dream moved forward, the action reminding him of when he would’ve welcomed the touch, flourished under the comfort and adoration it used to bring. Sometimes he wished for exile, the simpler time where he was dependent on someone else and he didn’t question why such a vile man’s embrace didn’t hurt.

He jerked backwards, his scarred back stinging.

“Let me wake up. I don’t want to see your fucking face any longer.”

There was a pattern now. Every time Tommy woke up after a Dream visit, his body stuck to his bedsheets with sweat and his head hurt with revelations.

School was more painful than usual—even the song Tubbo played during their music lesson in the practice room couldn’t shake the feeling that plagued him since this morning.

He had been jumpy all day, any loud sound or sudden movement had his heart racing and ice pooling in his stomach. But, as much as he wanted to go home the second the last bell sounded, he had promised Ranboo he’d help him with his coursework in the library after school.

The library was empty and the librarian trusted the two alone (since Ranboo occasionally helped her with sorting out the bookshelves). Tommy sat at the computer with his maths homework in front of him and Ranboo by his side. His regret for agreeing to this only worsened when he realised Ranboo’s coursework was about history, with his chosen subject of W. Soot. Having to read over Ranboo’s ramblings about whether or not W. Soot was a hero, anti-hero or villain didn’t help Tommy’s current mental state.

Tubbo kept spamming their group chat, begging for them to come over to the science block to see the practicals he was doing with his teacher—the occasional videos of Tubbo almost lighting his hair on fire distracted Tommy enough so he didn’t lose control of his breathing.

Every time Ranboo tapped him on the shoulder and asked him if this sentence made sense, a little bit of Tommy died inside.

“Could I word this differently?” Ranboo asked, pointing at the screen.

Soot's decline, as historian Sidney Bradshaw insists, was "*the greatest single underlying cause of the [L'Manberg] Wars*". This is supported by how Timmy Soot's diary entries during the Pogtopia era suggested that the man emotionally manipulated and perhaps physically abused him, and the Archives of L'Manberg include art pieces that hint at W. Soot's madness, with the ravine representing his growing insanity.

His breath hitched as Ranboo read out those words. He thought to keep his tears unshed at the reminder of Pogtopia and the ravine. He could never forget those sleepless nights, with the squeaking of bats and rustling in the walls echoing throughout the darkness. The dim torchlight wasn't enough to erase his fears, so he wrote blindly in that notebook until sleep claimed him. He didn't think over his words before writing them, didn't imagine the inferences that could occur by reading his rants of how his day went, of what his brother did to him during his maddened states. Those ravines ripped the last drop of good Tommy ever saw in his brother.

"Is that fine? Or should I explain the art more?"

He tore his eyes away from the screen as Ranboo scrolled down to the art. He thinned his lips to keep himself from whimpering.

"You haven't referenced the quote or the art piece," he said, trying to keep the hurt out of his voice. The lodge in his throat twisted painfully. "And you need to link it back to the historian's quote. How did... how is the abuse Timmy went through during Pogtopia related to the decline of W. Soot causing the wars?"

"Oh right, yeah. Thanks," Ranboo replied, grateful.

Something wet dripped onto his trouser leg, blood dripped from his palms. He gulped and wiped his hands with a tissue, digging the red out from under his fingernails.

He grabbed his notebook from his bag after cleaning his hands. He couldn't focus on maths questions anymore; it was mid-March and he still had no definite answer to what his myth was. He peered at the column of every male Greek myth, with each name having a cross or question mark written beside it. It should be simple with how much experience he had with analysing his life and attaching vague myths to them. But it was hard. Harder than usual and he didn't know why. Well, maybe it was because he actually had someone to live for in this life, people that he cared for and didn't want to leave behind.

"Tommy, how do I say I disagree with a historian? Because David Stevenson believes that W. Soot didn't care about L'Manberg at all, and even though I hate the guy, I still think he cared a little—"

Without warning, Tommy dashed his notebook against the window. His chair fell to the floor and he stopped himself from caving his fist into the closest wall. He couldn't do this, he couldn't listen to one of the people he cared for—loved, even—analyse and debate *his* history.

The world was against him and he didn't know how to handle it. He crumbled into himself, biting on his hand to stop the cries that choked him.

“Dude, what the hell? You could’ve smashed that window.”

“Does it look like I give a shit about that right now?” he seethed, his face full of anger.

“Look, if this is about the maths homework, I could—”

“It’s not!” he shouted, guilt washing through him as Ranboo flinched back into his seat. “I don’t care about that.”

Ranboo stood up and approached him slowly. “Then what is this really about, Tommy?”

His friend looked at him as if he was a wild animal or an explosive he needed to defuse. Tommy huffed out a broken laugh as he realised that that was *exactly* what he was; the tattoo on his wrist acted as a timer, if he squinted hard enough he could almost visualise the number of days he had left until he died, until the explosive destroyed him.

“What’s wrong?” Ranboo asked, softly.

Tommy rubbed at his face, his hands shaking and heart rattling. He picked up the notebook and slammed it onto the desk.

“Read it.”

“...huh?”

“Read. It.”

Ranboo hesitated before looking at the opened page. The same page that was printed in their history textbook, W. Soot’s only recorded message, the words Tommy read before going to bed.

“How?” Ranboo flicked through the notebook. “How- how did you get these passages?” He ran his gloved fingers over the writing. “Is this real?”

“It’s my notebook, Ranboo,” Tommy waited for his words to settle in. “I’m *him*.”

“How?” he repeated in disbelief, his masked face covering his reaction. He wasn’t sure if this was enough.

Tommy shrugged off his blazer and rolled up his sleeve to show his tattoo. “This is how.”

“You’re... you were Timmy?” Ranboo asked, doubt still present in his voice.

“In my first life, yes,” he said earnestly.

“First?”

“This is my fifth.”

Before he could stop himself, he pulled down the blinds on the window and unbuttoned his shirt. He needed to show more evidence. Tears tugged at his eyes, he just wanted someone to

believe him, for someone unaware to *know*.

“Tommy, what are you doing?”

He ignored him and took off his shirt. “Look!”

Ranboo inhaled harshly as he gazed upon the scars on Tommy’s back, torso and shoulder.

“Scars of different lives,” he supplied, trying to keep his shoulders loose.

He took hold of Ranboo’s hand. “Icarus,” he whispered as he pressed it against the burn scar on his shoulder, “Orpheus,” as he trailed over the rips on his torso, “...and Theseus. Timmy.” His voice wavered as Ranboo touched the marks on his back. He was thankful Sisyphus was more of a mental scar.

Silence settled between them and the lodge in Tommy’s throat finally eased. He put his shirt back on and gazed up at Ranboo.

“Do you believe me?” he asked, vulnerability drowning in his eyes.

Ranboo took his mask and glasses off, and pools of grey stared back at him. “Yeah, I believe you. Even if it makes zero sense, I trust you. You were- you were him.”

Relief flooded through him.

“You went through all that?” Ranboo’s voice ached. “Oh my, I made you read about your own brother—”

“I don’t want your pity.”

“It’s not pity, you idiot. I care about you and I forced you to proofread an essay about *that*.” Ranboo reached over and hugged him. “You are so strong.” He relaxed into the hold and closed his eyes, calm for the first time today. “How have you kept this all to yourself?”

“You’re the first person I’ve ever told, from the beginning.” His words were true, as Ranboo was the first non-cursed person; he couldn’t tell him about Niki.

The hug tightened. “So every time you die you come back as a different myth or something?”

Tommy pushed his face further into Ranboo’s shoulder, glad for once that the other was taller than him. He didn’t want to tell his friend the reality of the curse, that he was on a time limit and had less than a month to figure it all out before he died again. He couldn’t put Ranboo through that.

“If I figure out what myth is influencing the events of this life, then the cycle stops. I get to rest after I die, no more rebirths. Just... peace,” was what he went with, his voice cracking. “I don’t want to be reborn again.”

“Does Tubbo know?”

“No, no. He can’t know.” If Tubbo knew, he would figure out the meaning of the tattoo and that Niki was cursed as well—she hadn’t told him of her curse and he couldn’t take that from her. “I trust him a lot, maybe with my life, but he can’t know.”

“Okay, I won’t say anything.” Ranboo squeezed his shoulder. “How can I help?”

“You’d help me?” he mumbled as he looked up into Ranboo’s eyes; they held so much emotion, such sincerity and receptivity. It was comforting.

“Of course I would, you’re my best friend,” Ranboo said, beaming down at him.

Tommy’s lips upturned into a smile. “I didn’t think we were *that* close,” he joked. Ranboo huffed and hugged him again, out of spite.

“I’m not doing this coursework anymore, it’s time to research some Greek myths.” He let go of Tommy and returned to his computer. “I’m going to make a fact file on every single one of them.”

His heart burned. “Ranboo, you don’t have to do this for me.”

“I want to,” Ranboo said. “I would make PowerPoints as well but as you said, we’re not *that* close—”

“Shut the fuck up,” Tommy cut him off, whacking his arm.

The door slammed open and a small brunette boy in a white science cloak with black powder over his fingers rushed into the library. Goggles messed up Tubbo’s hair.

“Guys, I just blew up something and it stinks. You have to see this.”

Ranboo gave Tommy a look. “We’ll continue this later.”

“Hurry up, they might put out the fire soon!”

“Coming!”

Chapter End Notes

Don’t mind me using some sections from my A-level history coursework about the causes of World War One for a Minecraft fanfiction. It is now canon that historian Sidney Bradshaw Fray was a c!Wilbur anti, as well as a supporter that alliances were the main reason why WW1 happened.

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

hello! longer chapter this time. I am in a happier mood so I could finally write MCC, mans got good A-levels and was accepted into uni so blame that.

Tommy had done many things throughout his lives, many immoral and challenging things (there was that one time he helped an old lady cross the road so that cancelled out any of his wrongdoings), yet he couldn't for the life of him figure out how to style this bandana.

He was on team Red Rabbits for MCC today and although he liked the red t-shirt with his name written on the back, the bandana confused him. He didn't know whether to wear it like a headband or tie it around his wrist to cover his tattoo. Either way, he couldn't tie it properly. He managed to survive wars—well, not *survive* but endure them until death—and *this* was what he struggled with.

It was embarrassing, humiliating even. Eventually, he decided to just wear it as a headband (the knot was still too tight).

He walked down into the kitchen and sat down. Wilbur was wearing red as well since they were on the same team—each MCC team had a person from year groups eight to thirteen. The Championships had over fifty teams, which was funny since there were normal-sounding teams like Red Rabbits or Pink Parrots, but then they ran out of colours so some unlucky fuckers were stuck with Mustard Mammoths. He truly felt sorry for the people who had to buy a mustard coloured t-shirt; the school was *very* strict about having the correct shaded clothes. If it was too similar to yellow, he wouldn't be surprised if that kid turned up missing within a week.

“What the fuck is on your head?” Wilbur asked, pointing at Tommy's bandana. Tommy flipped him off, scowling at how Wilbur had his tied around his neck.

“I knotted it at least.”

“You *attempted* to knot it,” Wilbur corrected. “You've twisted your hair into for God's sake.”

“Stop harassing me,” he exclaimed, jerking backwards from Wilbur's hands, not letting the man touch his hair.

“I'm not harassing you—” Wilbur proceeded to say as he continued to get closer to him.

“Phil!” Tommy yelled. “Control your son!”

“If he’s causing shit, he’s not my son,” Phil replied as he strolled into the kitchen, Techno closely behind him with a plate of scrambled eggs. Techno wore similar sports gear to his fencing outfit—he was one of the referees for MCC—whilst Phil was gowned in a red attire for support.

“I hate this family,” Wilbur grumbled.

“There’s the door,” Techno said, causing Wilbur to throw a spoon at his chest.

Phil sighed as two of his sons fought across the table. “I regret being a father.”

“You don’t regret me though, do you?” Tommy asked, jokingly. But the doughy look Phil gave him wiped the humour away, a certain softness creased his eyes.

“You are this family’s only achievement,” Phil said. “I need to show you something before you eat.”

Tommy trailed after him, leaving the other two fighting—Techno currently had Wilbur in a headlock.

They stopped in the corridor to Phil’s office, in front of the same wall with the framed screenshot of a Minecraft house. He never noticed that there were three medals mounted on the walls before with pictures hung directly underneath each. He stepped forward, the golden medals looked more like coins; they had ‘MCC’ and a numbered season engraved on them.

“This is some cult shit,” Tommy said.

Phil ruffled his hair teasingly. “Nope, these are our pride possessions. And if you win one today, it’ll be put right next to Techno’s.”

Phil gestured to the latest framed coin; a picture of Techno with a golden crown and Wilbur and Phil beside him hung underneath it.

“What if I wanted to sell it on eBay?”

“Then I’d disown you.”

“What about Amazon?”

“Even worse, you’d need to be emancipated at fifteen,” Phil said and Tommy laughed. “But seriously, try your best today and if you don’t win, I’ll be proud of you.”

He smiled toothlessly at the man. “You really are a soccer mum.”

“Don’t associate me with them, I have to sit with the fuckers for the rest of the day.”

Tommy peered closer at the images near Phil and Wilbur’s coins. Underneath Phil’s was an old picture of him next to a woman with raven hair and the kindest smile he’d ever seen before. Then below Wilbur’s was a younger version of himself with the same woman by his side. He assumed it was Wilbur’s mother and Phil’s wife.

“I will bring another coin to the Craft name, do not worry,” Tommy said. He noticed Phil’s eyes fixated on the picture of his deceased wife and a chill pooled in his stomach. “Quick question though, could I be disqualified for sabotaging other teams?”

Phil wheezed, taking his eyes off the framed images.

“I’m being serious! There’s like sixty teams and I’m new to this.”

The man reached forward and untied the knot to Tommy’s bandana, sliding it off his head. “Just remember Techno’s training and you’ll do well.” Phil loosely wrapped the red fabric around Tommy’s neck in the similar style Wilbur had. “And sabotage is easy in Ace Race, abuse the shit out of that.”

Tommy grinned and tugged lightly on the bandana Phil had fixed for him. “Will do, Mr Minecraft.”

Now, Tommy had the suspicion the school he attended was rich—despite how the water fountains never worked and for a month there were no toilet seats in the boy’s bathrooms (blame the year ten’s fucking around). But it was obvious where most of the school’s funding went when they arrived there: to MCC. Because holy shit, it was decked out.

There was an obstacle course trekking along the field and the AstroTurf had several capture the flag arenas placed in there. From what he could see through the opened gymnasium doors, climbing frames and multiple wipe-out sweepers were laid out.

“How much did they spend on this shit?” Tommy asked, still gaping at the amount of shit this school had prepared just for sport’s day.

“As much as you go on about hating Tories Tommy, you attend an elitist private school,” Wilbur said.

“What the fuck?”

“Dad’s loaded with cash.”

“Shut it,” Phil protested from beside them.

“Humble man, so in denial of his wealth and success.” Wilbur dodged a smack around the head.

“Alright, I’ll be in the stands, good luck boys.” Tommy gave the man a thumbs-up as he walked to the crowds of parents and year sevens; he followed Wilbur into the main hall, where everyone was already gathered into their teams.

He strayed from Wilbur to find a certain bee boy in green. Though, a hand gripped on his t-shirt and pulled him backwards. The hand belonged to Clementine, who was wearing Pink, with Niki in the same colour. The two were in the Pink Parrots team.

“Hi!” Clementine said enthusiastically. Her hair was dyed differently from what it was yesterday—strips of it were pastel pink, in solidarity with her team. Yep, he was right earlier, MCC was some cult shit.

“Sorry, I can’t interact with enemy teams,” Tommy replied, fiddling with his red bandana.

“Says the one who was looking around for Tubbo,” Niki said.

Tommy rolled his eyes. “I need to instil fear into him.”

“Threatening the other teams is a bannable offence,” Clementine said and Niki gawked at her.

“Kinda hypocritical to say, Clem,” Niki chuckled. Tommy tilted his head, confused. “She almost made a year nine on Yellow Yacks cry five minutes ago.”

“Jesus Christ, what did you say to them?”

“I may have threatened their team because Vitalia is on it, and the younger ones took it personally.”

“Natural selection, I guess.”

Niki sighed heavily. “Please never have children.”

“If Ace Race goes badly, I don’t think I’ll be able to have kids after this,” Tommy said, his tone lacked humour yet Niki choked laughter into her hand. “What? I’m being completely serious! I’m vulnerable to—”

“Anyway!” Clementine interrupted. She passed him a hairband that was on her wrist. “I brought you over here so you can help me. You must’ve learnt how to braid hair from that girl who was like a sister to you.”

Tommy avoided Niki’s narrowed eyes as his face reddened. Niki *did* teach him how to braid and style longer hair, especially as she struggled to do her own because her hands shook too much after the First L’Manberg War. He was terrible at it, and she never let him forget that, but he made up for his bad braiding by intertwining flowers (and grass) into her hair. He got better at it during exile—he plaited his own hair to remind himself of her, a silly action that brought more comfort to him than it healthily should’ve.

Reluctantly, he nodded and Clementine beamed. He French-braided her hair and managed to thread in her pink bandana.

She briefly hugged him when he finished it. “At least now if I don’t win MCC, I’ll lose with style. Oh also, if you’re ever against Yellow Yacks, go hard on them.”

“Will do,” Tommy said. “Good luck, hope you lose!”

He gave them one last smile before continuing his hunt for Tubbo. He eventually found him with the rest of the Green Guardians. Tubbo had his bandana tied in a bow around his neck. Ranboo was next to him, though he wasn't wearing a coloured t-shirt, just casual clothes and jeans.

"Ranboo, why aren't you wearing your team colour?" Tommy asked, tugging at the boy's flower-patterned flannel.

Tubbo burst out laughing and Ranboo crossed his arms, huffing loudly.

"I'm banned from MCC," Ranboo explained. He had never heard such agony come out of Ranboo's mouth before.

Tommy gaped at him. "What did you even do to get banned?"

"Basically he—"

"Tubbo, shut up!" he covered the smaller boy's mouth with his hand, glad it was gloved for how Tubbo immediately licked it. "I'm simply too awesome for this event."

Before Ranboo could further explain himself, the bell sounded and Tommy made his way back to his team. Wilbur was talking to the year twelve boy (his name might be Grian or groin—he wasn't sure but he betted on the first name), leaving Tommy awkwardly staring at the other lower years, three girls from year eight to ten. Despite how the year eight was under five feet tall, trying to hunt her in Parkour Tag would be a challenge. And the other two girls looked like they'd bully Tommy in the corridor. So his team seemed competent.

Soon enough, a middle-aged man dressed in similar sporting clothes to Techno stepped up on the stage. Tommy's PE teacher, Coach Smajor. The man tapped on the microphone, screeching echoed throughout the hall from the speakers.

"Whoops, sorry about that," Coach Smajor said, his Scottish accent as prevalent as always. "Anyhow, this year's MCC will begin shortly, but before we have to tell you about the changes for this year. This time, as the school's population has increased, one game will not be played so choose wisely with your voting and Sands of Time takes place in the photography darkrooms now."

Coach Smajor carried on with his speech and Tommy successfully concealed his laughter when the man said the word 'yellow' multiple times as his son was in that team. Fucking Scottish people. When he finished speaking, Wilbur passed out tokens for them to use to vote.

"Get Build Mart out of the way, I don't want to play that dogshit game," Wilbur said as they watched the front-row teams put their tokens into the selection of minigames.

"Hey, Build Mart is a good minigame," Grian objected.

"You're a builder! Builder bias," Wilbur quipped back since Grian was part of the HermitCraft club (don't ask Tommy what they did during those meetings, he had no fucking

idea).

“They nerfed it anyway because of Technoblade two years ago, it’s worth to either play it early or hope it gets skipped,” the year ten girl advised.

“Please don’t tell me you’re a Technoblade stan.”

“Techno has stans?” Tommy gagged at the mere thought of it.

And to his dismay, the girl nodded. “He’s good at MCC.”

“Jesus Christ,” Wilbur sighed. “Just vote for a fucking game guys, as long as it’s not Ace Race, I’m fine.”

It ended up being Ace Race.

“Are you fucking—” Wilbur shouted, causing Grian to grimace. “Sorry.”

Tommy laughed at the pure disgust on Wilbur’s face. “Come on, man, you’ve got this.”

“Shut the fuck up, child.”

“I take it back. I hope you trip over on that course and are no longer able to have children. You will never fulfil your dream of making your own army of kids—”

“Why is your go-to insult whenever we do exercise to do with someone’s fertility rate?”

“Quirky,” the year nine answered for him.

Tommy moved forward towards her, his fists clenched, but Wilbur pulled him back. “Okay, we’re not doing this here. Friendly fire isn’t on. Let’s just get to the field for this shitty minigame.”

“Meet me at the park at nine pm BST, you will regret this shit,” Tommy jeered, glaring at her.

“Stop threatening thirteen-year-old girls, Tommy,” Wilbur said as he tugged Tommy along, following the rest of the teams to the field.

“She called me quirky!” he protested.

When they reached the field, he spotted Phil in the crowds and waved (he didn’t realise the man was wearing the striped bucket hat he had gotten him for Christmas—even if it clashed with Phil’s red outfit, Tommy liked the sentiment).

The Ace Race course looked more intimidating the closer he got to it. He was glad that each year group was separated for their run of the course; he feared for the year thirteens that would accidentally nudge into Wilbur during their race.

Whilst Tommy studied the layout, Wilbur decided to shit-talk his fellow opponents.

“Are you sure you haven’t tested this before, Scott?” Wilbur yelled, smirking as the boy on Yellow Yacks squawked at him.

“Shut up Wilbur!” Scott called back.

Wilbur turned back to his team. “I’m targeting him. There’s always a part of the course where you’re hidden from the referees.”

“Isn’t that a bit harsh?” Grian asked.

“It’s what he gets for being a nepotism baby,” Wilbur said, which was fair enough since Scott was Coach Smajor’s son. “Anyway, I’m up first. Good luck lads.”

Tommy watched as Wilbur ran up to the starting line and dread flowed through him. He was beginning to understand why some people were banned from MCC, with how violent every person looked. Or maybe that was just the effect of Ace Race.

Throughout Wilbur’s race, he could hear him swearing and cussing from where he sat on the benches. He didn’t know what someone had done to Wilbur for them to be called a ‘massive, fucking cunt’ but he assumed it had something to do with Wilbur falling out the tunnel.

He clapped the loudest when Niki finally finished; he ignored the looks he got from his younger teammates for cheering on the enemy team. *Obviously*, they did not know the legend of Niki Nihachu herself, the only person deserving to be cheered on by the opponent.

After Grian’s race, Tommy was next and the blood dripping across someone’s eyebrow as they walked to the waiting stands didn’t ease his anxiety.

“You gonna shit yourself, dude?” Tubbo asked as he tied his shoelaces for the fourth time.

“What?” he exclaimed. “No? The fuck?”

“You could’ve fooled me,” Tubbo said. “Don’t worry about this though, you’re bound to be assaulted at least once during Ace Race.”

“That isn’t helpful.”

“I’m not trying to be.”

“You literally said don’t worry—”

The klaxon interrupted him and the race began.

Already pushing someone out of the way, Tommy jumped across the spinnable platforms, just quick enough so it didn’t twist and make him fall, closely following behind Tubbo. He climbed over the vibrant green wall and almost stopped to watch two people kick each other off the ropes—as entertaining as that shit-fest was, he had a minigame to win.

Tubbo stacked it over the pillars, so Tommy overtook him and swung through the monkey bars part. Someone tried to tickle him during it (he was pretty sure it was Clementine), but

thankfully he didn't fall into the pit. Next was a BTEC Ninja Warrior wall that Ranboo could probably just jump over, and he would never admit that it took him several attempts to climb over it. As much as he proclaimed he was six-foot-three, an eight-foot wall exhibited too much tall energy for him.

He used the many shortcuts Techno made him memorise during the running and jump-pad part of it—the course always had the same mechanics but just with a different layout. Techno was the sort of person to analyse every single detail and create a PowerPoint slide to exploit it.

“Clementine, get out of the fucking way!” he shouted as the girl took up most of the space on the platform before the wall rock climbing portion of the race.

“If there wasn't a referee currently staring at us, I would boot you off this platform so hard.”

“You just wait until the tunnel section,” he threatened and sprinting forward, only to get punched in the neck multiple times by a fucking machine. He now had a grudge against machinery, so if computers ever developed consciousness in the future, he'd make it his mission to verbally harass them to the point of tears.

Tubbo had now caught up to him, so the tunnel section was more fun. As soon as he crawled into it, the tubes around him hiding the opponents from the referee's eyes, he pushed Tubbo out of one of the holes in the tunnel whilst shouting, “Bye-bye bee boy!”

He came in the top five and may have sacrificed every single friendship he had, but it was worth it. When Tubbo finished after having to restart the climbing section, the shorter boy approached him, his face murderous.

“I will fuck you up,” Tubbo seethed, prodding Tommy's chest. “I will literally skin you alive and—”

“You're not as threatening now that I know how loudly you scream whilst falling off a tunnel.”

Tubbo backed up to tackle him and Tommy ran away, hiding behind a referee.

“Let me at him!” Tubbo bellowed, fighting against the referee's grip.

Tommy laughed loudly and sought safety from Wilbur, who was drinking his water beside the waiting stands.

“Help me, I've angered Tubbo,” he begged, grabbing Wilbur's shoulders and placing the man in front of him.

“You're dead.”

“But I came top five!”

“You're still dead.”

Thankfully, Tubbo was put in time-out for the rest of the Ace Race rounds.

Hole in the Wall was next and it took ten minutes for Tommy to stop laughing at the name. Even if he was called childish, immature and various other insults by the girls on his team, it did not matter. He had the right to act this way since he carried his teammates in Ace Race with the number of points he got compared to them (the year eight managed to score more points than him but he decided to ignore that).

In the gymnasium, there were four wipe-out sweepers set out, so four teams could compete at the same time with each person's endurance times being noted down. There didn't seem to be enough protective padding around the massive sweeper thing for Tommy's liking—knowing his luck, he'd probably crack his head open (and not die, but it would traumatise his teammates).

Disregarding that, Hole in the Wall was quite amusing. The prick who called him quirky on his team got decked by the sweeper early on, making the year ten laugh at her and get sniped by the machine as well. It was a weird game of Dominos. Even though it wasn't good for his teammates to be taken out so early, the entertainment factor made up for it.

Either way, ignoring how Hole in the Wall tried to sabotage his chances of being a father in the future, he managed to win and endure the longest against the four teams. Someone in the other team kept shouting that he was wall-glitching but how the fuck could you glitch in real life?

He treasured the small smile he saw on Techno's face when he had to write down Tommy as the winner of that round. Sure, it fed his ever-growing ego that really *shouldn't* get any larger, yet to have the Blade's validation was worth more than any gold.

However, he did *not* want to talk about what happened during Sands of Time. It was a stupid minigame and he sucked at escape rooms. Who the fuck made the clues multi-coloured in a darkroom with barely any lighting? He may have lived during times before electricity was created, but this was bullshit. He didn't blame his team for leaving him behind (he did blame Wilbur), though he still cussed them out and almost floored the quirky prick when the minigame finished—she called him a 'pussio', it would've been a deserved attack.

But somehow Parkour Tag was even worse. Clementine chose to rugby tackle him to the floor when he ran outside of the climbing frames. As much as mud looked tasty, it was not fun to eat. The small year eight carried the Red Rabbits throughout that shitfest, so they kept their high placement on the leader board.

The break before the last game was Tommy's saving grace. He sat on the bench with Tubbo with Ranboo in between them—it was a safety tactic as Tubbo had attempted to strangle him many times as he ate his sandwich.

“How’s your team doing?” Ranboo asked, failing to keep his jealousy out of his voice.

“Great, we’re third right now,” Tommy said.

Tubbo sipped on his drink. “We’re tenth, so barely in the semi-finals.”

Because of how MCC had expanded since Phil first played (so many, many, many years ago), only the top ten teams could play the final game and be able to qualify into Dodgebolt. Tommy didn’t think he could survive *that* many rounds of Battle Box if all sixty teams played.

“I’m tempted to throw though, so you get into the finales since there is no fucking way Green Guardians will manage to get first or second,” Tubbo said to Tommy, surprising him. “But this doesn’t mean I forgive you for attacking me in that tunnel.”

“If it means anything to you, I would do it again in a heartbeat,” Tommy said.

“I hate you so much.”

“On second thought, I’m glad I’m banned. I’m scared of what Tommy would do to me during those minigames,” Ranboo said, causing Tommy to grin. “Yep, I’m totally glad now.”

The bell sounded and Tommy threw his rubbish into the bin. He joined his team and walked towards the AstroTurf, gaping at what he saw. Coach Smajor really went all-hands-on-deck for Battle Box.

There were five arenas inside the court; each had four moveable climbing frames as towers in the corners surrounding the flag pole in the middle. Raised platforms outlined the arena.

From how Techno described it, Battle Box was kinda like capture the flag with how you had to get into the middle and tie your colour flag to the pole and raise it to the top before the enemy team. Though, there were fighting mechanics, so if you were hit with an arrow or hit by a sword, you were out of that round—as well as if you were pushed off the platforms.

As the other unqualified teams settled themselves into the viewing stands with the parents, Tommy noticed Ranboo talking to Techno, who was near the referee table.

“Ranboo, sit back down, you’re not participating as a referee,” Techno huffed out as he continued to write down stats onto his note board.

“Please Techno, I know I’m banned but it wasn’t *that* big of a deal.”

“You broke someone’s leg in the last Battle Box.” Oh. So that’s what Ranboo did.

“Well—”

“We had to call an air ambulance.”

“No one told me tackling wasn’t allowed,” Ranboo defended.

“You body-slammed an opponent two-feet shorter than you. Do you lack common sense?” Techno put down his note board and shoved the boy away from him. “Go back to Phil and your parents.”

“Will bribery work?”

“Ranboo,” Techno dead-panned.

“Ugh fine.”

Tommy laughed and walked closer as Ranboo went back to the stands, catching Techno’s attention. “Why aren’t you with your team? The rounds start soon.”

“None of them are cooperating,” Tommy complained. Even though his team had been together for the past five minutes, none of them talked about how they were about to handle Battle Box—Wilbur kept asking Grian about HermitCraft and the others he didn’t give a shit about to listen to them.

“Then make them listen, take on the leader role, Tommy,” Techno said.

He sighed and looked back at his team, who was awkwardly standing there, observing other teams that were in avid conversations about strategy and planning.

Techno gripped Tommy’s shoulder. “This is the final game and you need to win the majority of the rounds to have a guaranteed spot in the finals. You’ve got this.”

“I know but...”

“I’ll talk to Phil about easing your current punishment for the whole underage drinking business if you get into Dodgebolt.”

Tommy’s head shot up. “Deal.”

He returned to his team with newfound confidence. “Alright then, since none of you fuckers want to speak, you’ll just have to listen and follow my lead.”

He paused, waiting for one of the pricks to object. They didn’t, so he continued. “This is what we’re going to do...”

After a gruelling talk with them, they all had roles and knew what they needed to do. He assigned himself the sword, knowing he was the best at close combat, the year nine, ten and Grian were in charge of the left side with their bows, the year eight had the tower for call-outs, and Wilbur was on flag duty.

“I’m wool boy,” Wilbur kept repeating as the two waited on the right side for the countdown.

“...Will, it’s a flag,” Tommy said.

“Woolbur,” he declared and Tommy face-palmed, hoping that his sword was real so he could just stab himself with it to get away from him.

Regardless of Wilbur being the weird one for once, Tommy was sure they'd at least get a couple of wins during Battle Box. And they did.

The most memorable round was the final one, which was against Tubbo's team, who shouted seconds before their matchup that he took back not trying against Tommy. So he was prepared to get his arse beat—even though Tubbo was shorter than him, he had to admit that the other was stronger.

The klaxon rang and Tommy's grip on his sword tightened as he hurried to the right with Wilbur.

"Two left, three right and one's holding mid!" the girl in the tower said.

Wilbur cocked his bow and fired, missing Tubbo, who stood on the opposite side of the platform. Tommy rushed to hide behind a small box as arrows flew past him. One arrow's tip stuck into the fabric of the box, centimetres away from Tommy's head. If it was just aimed a little higher, it would've hit him.

His neck strained as he looked back at Wilbur, who hid behind the climbing frame. Grian yelled from across the arena that he had gotten two; from the corner of his eyes, two Green Guardians plummeted into the pit. A sword travelled through the air from the right side, almost hitting Grian. The year nine dashed to retrieve it but missed and tripped into the pit. Fucking idiot. If anything, *that* was quirky.

Tommy breathed sharply and peaked over the box. Tubbo and two of his teammates were still at the end of the platform with their bows drawn. He ducked.

The year eight in the tower shrieked as an arrow hurt her shoulder. She retreated into the waiting box.

"Come on, Tommy! Stop hiding, you prick!" Tubbo taunted from across the arena. Tommy peaked over the box again to flip him off—probably not the most tactical decision but it did piss Tubbo off even more.

"I have a short-range weapon, fuck off dickhead!"

Wilbur managed to eliminate one of Tubbo's teammates, making it two versus two on the right side.

"We're out!" Grian shouted. "They're rushing mid now!"

It was just Tommy and Wilbur left against three people.

Tubbo sprinted forward, his sword raised. Wilbur let out a *manly* squeal and ran backwards. Tommy scaled the empty climbing tower, Tubbo right on his tail.

His hands burned. Tubbo jumped up onto the podium, pushing him to the edge.

"How do?" Tommy greeted, smacking Tubbo's hands off him.

Tommy shoved him off the ledge, seizing his bow off as Tubbo struggled to climb back up. Drawing the bow, Tommy shot one of the opponents focusing on Wilbur. Tubbo grabbed his ankle, dragging him to the podium floor before he could shoot the other. He tugged harshly and Tommy fell with him. As he hit the floor, he flung his sword at the Green Guardian at mid, striking their leg.

Both Tommy and Tubbo dashed out of the arena, leaving Wilbur against one other person.

“Wilbur clutch it!” Tommy yelled.

“Shut the fuck up and let me do this!” Wilbur said back, loading up his bow and arrow. The last Green Guardian dodged his arrow and continued tying his flag to the pole. Wilbur darted forward and rammed into him, knocking them off the platform and into the pit. He stabled his footing and ran into the middle, attaching his coloured flag and raising it to the top of the pole with two seconds left on the timer.

Tommy shouted so much after that his throat was hoarse.

They won eight out of the nine rounds, only losing one to Yellow Yacks—Scott’s team with Clementine’s girlfriend, Vitalia, and another HermitCraft member, Mumbo Jumbo (he didn’t believe that was the guy’s real name but he was brothers with someone called Technoblade for God’s sake).

When Battle Box was over, he raced with Wilbur to the leader board. Coach Smajor stood on the referee table with a megaphone.

Another rush of adrenaline phased through him as the words, “Coming in second place: Red Rabbits!” propelled through the shitty megaphone.

He could hear Phil cheering from the front rows.

They were going into the finals.

As his teamed prepared themselves for Dodgebolt in various ways (the girls gave each other pep talks whilst Grian and Wilbur taunted the Yellow Yacks), Tommy fiddled with his bandana around his neck.

He wanted that fucking coin and he would get it if it was the last thing he’d ever do—which was probable in this life. He wasn’t sure what the main reason for wanting the coin was though, whether it was for the clout or just how he was desperate to have something of his be put up in the Craft house before he died. After all, it was days away from April.

With each day passing, he grew closer to death. Part of him began to accept it more, even if there was still that fight in his heart every time Phil patted his back and called him ‘mate’,

and Techno let him watch him play Bedwars, or when Ranboo would cackle at something stupid Tubbo said, and Wilbur would play his songs to him in the dead of the night if Tommy couldn't fall asleep.

It wasn't the coin or the win that mattered, it was more that Tommy wanted to leave something behind for them to remember him by. Surely the Crafts wouldn't forget about him if his picture at MCC was framed on their house walls.

He blinked the stinging out of his eyes as Clementine approached him. Her elation was enough to dim the reminder of his upcoming death with the finals of MCC.

"Don't lose," she ordered, her face serious for a moment. "If Vitalia wins a coin before me, I will never hear the end of it."

He chuckled. "I'll win, don't worry."

"Normally I would try to demoralise you because you're being too cocky, but I'll let this slide," Clementine said. "Be as confident as you want."

Coach Smajor called for his team and Clementine returned to the viewing stands, giving him a thumbs-up before she left.

He joined his team and tried to calm down his breathing. MCC had no right being this stressful—he didn't even know what MCC fucking stood for.

Finals took place in the sports court, using the painted lines on the pavement as separate boxes for each team's side. The first team to two points won.

Wilbur grasped his hand around Tommy's shoulder and stared down at him. "We're going to get this dub. I refuse to lose against Scott Smajor."

"Let's destroy nepotism," Tommy stated and Wilbur nodded in agreement.

Three dodgeballs were placed on the middle line.

"Are we rushing or letting them grab them first?" Grian asked.

"I'll rush for one," the year eight said. "I'm fast."

They all nodded and got into position.

"If we win this, I won't clart you as soon as this is over." Tommy directed his words to the prick who called him quirky at the beginning of all this.

"You'll be done for physically attacking a thirteen-year-old girl," she said.

"And?"

The klaxon sounded and the crowd cheered. The year eight sprinted and grabbed a ball as the Yellow Yacks retrieved the other two.

Tommy made it his mission to be as annoying as possible by never staying in the same spot for more than one second. If his past lives had taught him anything, besides trauma responses, it was how to successfully dodge things being thrown at you—with Theseus literally surviving through wars and Icarus managing to finesse a Romanian cult.

One of the balls hit the year ten and the other missed Wilbur, though he did trip over himself when he dodged.

Tommy lobbed the ball he picked up at Vitalia, hitting her in the shoulder; he could hear Clementine laughing from the stands.

Mumbo Jumbo grabbed the ball that hit her and threw it. The pavement floor didn't stop Tommy from diving across it, skidding his knees, to catch the ball, getting the man out. It's what the fucker deserved for giving off fake British vibes.

Grian whooped loudly. "Redstone won't save you now!"

With the final hit being from Wilbur, taking out the poor year eight on the Yellow Yacks, Tommy's team scored a point.

The second—and potentially—last round began and Wilbur was immediately whacked in the face with a ball thrown by Scott. Tommy noted to laugh at him later when winning MCC wasn't currently on the line.

Tommy aimed at Vitalia again, targeting the girl to death, and succeeding as it hit her. He almost felt bad, but then the girl cussed him out in Italian as she walked off the court. He could tell why she and Clementine were together now.

The Yellow Yacks got ahold of the three dodgeballs and stopped just a step behind the line in the middle, which was *too* close for comfort.

The year ten Techno stan managed to hit Mumbo Jumbo and another Yellow Yack with both balls.

After a back-and-forth match of the Red Rabbits missing their shots and the enemy team hitting everyone out except Tommy, he was left ball-less (pitiful) whilst the remaining opponent, Scott, had three of them.

The crowd cheered louder as he dodged one of the balls, it narrowly avoided his head. Now *that* was a targeted attack.

Tommy missed his hit on Scott again and it was like he was in the war again, but the lack of blood made it obvious that this was just sport's day. Though, the rush of adrenaline felt homely, familiar.

He remembered being outnumbered during the Battle of the Lake and leaving that battlefield with all his organs still intact. This was nothing.

"Fucking throw something, you dickhead!" someone yelled (probably Tubbo) and Tommy's grip on the dodgeball hardened.

Gathering all the strength he could, he threw the ball aimed at Scott as he shouted, “Scottish people aren’t real!” and it smacked him straight in the eyes.

The next thing Tommy knew he was being picked up and hauled on Wilbur’s shoulders. His ears rang as red confetti blasted at him and his teammates. His mouth hurt from how widely he smiled.

Holy fuck, they had won. He could finally put that coin on that wall, bring *something* to the Craft household besides the inevitable douse of grief and death. He would be remembered as that foster kid that outshined the rest of the fuckers they’d probably foster after his passing. The kid the Crafts wanted to adopt, wanted to *keep*.

He held the coin close to him. Tears pricked at his eyes as Wilbur lifted him down and hugged him tightly, shouting praises into his ear that he could barely hear over the crowd.

“We won! Brothers-in-arms,” Tommy beamed at him back. “We’re like brothers.”

Wilbur sniffed, almost crying himself out of happiness, and ruffled Tommy’s hair. “Don’t say that I will cry.”

“You already are, fucker!”

Wilbur swept him up into his arms, this time cussing Tommy out as he squeezed him closely.

“Come on, Dad wants to take a picture for the frame.”

Wilbur, with his arms secured around Tommy, ran through the crowd to find Phil, who was with Techno and Ranboo.

“You won!” Phil said, tapping at the MCC coin tucked in Tommy’s hands.

“I did it for you, Philza Minecraft,” he joked, though a part of him wasn’t joking.

Phil wheezed and pat him on the back. “Well done, mate.”

Warmth burst at his chest and Techno gave him a nod of approval.

“Picture time,” Phil said as he took out his phone to take a selfie.

Wilbur snatched the phone out of his hand. “No, Dad stop! You’re angling it like a middle-aged mother on Facebook.” He chuckled the phone at Ranboo. “Take it for us.”

He pulled Tommy back into his side, Techno next to him, and Phil put his arms around his three sons. Honestly, he could die right now and he wouldn’t mind—he was surrounded by a family that accepted him. Something he always wanted, and now it felt real.

After the picture was taken, Tommy sprung out of Wilbur’s soft grip and rushed towards Tubbo.

“I know you don’t like hugs, big man, but please!” he said to Tubbo, fondness burning off him.

Tubbo sighed. “You get *one* hug for winning.” He wrapped his arms around Tubbo, ignoring how Wilbur called him clingy. He could feel the shorter boy laugh into his chest. “I’m still kicking the shit out of you later though for Ace Race.”

He giggled, his head resting on top of Tubbo’s. “I’ll just push you out of a tunnel again.”

Tommy let go of him and took off his red bandana to tie it around Tubbo’s neck. Tubbo did the same, leaving the boys adorned in each other’s colours. Tommy gripped on the green fabric and smiled, tightness roamed at his chest and he didn’t know if it was love, but it sure felt like it.

“Now Ranboo has even more reason to be jealous of MCC,” Tubbo said. Tommy laughed and flipped Ranboo off, who was talking to Wilbur and Techno. “Sleep round mine tonight, a bench-trio sleepover.”

“Who the fuck came up with that name for us?” he remembered Ranboo was the one to change their group chat name to it.

“The school did. It’s the reason why our lunch bench is never taken,” Tubbo explained.

“I’m going to burn that bench to the ground.”

“Then you have to find us somewhere else to sit.”

“Nevermind,” Tommy backtracked. “I’ll ask if I can sleep round.”

He pulled Tubbo with him back to Phil.

“Since I won, would I be allowed to sleep round Tubbo’s?” he asked, preparing to whip out the puppy eyes to convince Phil.

“If you come back hungover, I swear to God, I’m un-adopting you,” Phil said.

“You can’t do that! You haven’t even adopted me.”

“Not yet!”

His face flushed.

During the ‘bench-trio sleepover’, Tommy munched on his pizza, leaving the crusts, as Tubbo and Ranboo debated over which Netflix film to watch. By the time he had finished his

meal, the two had decided on YouTube compilations of try not to laugh challenges—it ended with Tommy choking on his drink many times and Tubbo smacking the shit out of his back, much harder than you should if your friend was choking. If anything, Tubbo contributed to his pain.

Ranboo spent most of the night complaining over how isolated he felt since he didn't have a bandana to share with them.

"Ranboo, my beloved," Tubbo began, tapping him on the arm, "get over it."

Tommy wheezed as Ranboo pouted since he expected comforting words and not *that*.

"That gives me an idea. Be right back," Ranboo said as he grabbed the laptop at the end of the bed and exited the room.

"Is he gonna start crying or some shit?" Tommy asked.

Tubbo shrugged. "No, but he normally announces when he's going to do that."

He coughed out more laughter, Tubbo joining in this time.

When the fatigue caught up to him after the eventful day, Tommy laid down on the blow-up bed and stared up at Tubbo's painted ceiling. The mix of star constellations and planets was similar to the bench by the seawall. He needed to visit there soon.

As he gazed over the Perseus constellation, his eyes latched on the Algol Demon Star, the head of Medusa, the face of death.

"It's almost April," he mumbled. The bedding of the blow-up bed dipped on his right side.

"Well, we have a week. But yeah. Time flies fast, doesn't it?" Tubbo said, his voice lighter.

Tommy nodded; Tubbo's words were more accurate than they should've been. He had been with this family, in this town, since November and it still felt like that first day was only one month ago, not five—almost six.

He wanted time to stop, for it to just let him experience *this* for longer. He wanted to love the ache in the corners of his mouth from smiling too much and not have the constant reminder flowing through his head that this wouldn't last. That those smiles and laughter would cease one day, end on April ninth and probably never be as bright in the next life.

Would he even have a family in the next life? Or friends like the one beside him?

He couldn't replace the Crafts, he couldn't replace any of them. His stomach clenched. He didn't want to find out.

"My birthday is in April," Tommy shuddered, hoping that the strain in his voice wasn't noticeable.

"Oh cool!" Tubbo said. "What do you want for it?"

Tommy bit on his lip, keeping his sadness at bay. If he gave a serious answer, he'd cry on the spot.

Or if he thought about how he hadn't received a birthday present for his sixteenth before and never will because of how—

No. This wasn't the time. He had just won MCC and was enjoying himself at a bench-trio sleepover with his two best friends. He couldn't do this *here*.

"Money and bitches," was what he went with.

"I can supply you with the first one, but not the second."

"You're not a real friend then," Tommy quipped, looking away from the star of Medusa. Tubbo shoved at his shoulder, laughing.

"Shut up, Tommy."

"No bitches, no friendship," he kept repeating. Ranboo decided that the third time of repeating this was his moment to come into the room.

He placed the laptop back onto the bed and sighed at the two of them. "Despite the purchase I had just made, I want to end this friendship."

"It's funny you think you have a choice in that decision," Tubbo shot back.

"And a divorce."

Tubbo shook his head again and Tommy grinned. *This* was why he wanted more time. For them.

Later that night, Tommy was curled up on the blow-out bed, Ranboo by his left and Tubbo on his own bed to his right.

A rustling came from his left side then his bed dipped.

"What do you want?" he grumbled, exhaustion heavy in his voice.

Ranboo's shoulders brushed against his and grey eyes peered back at him. "What if you're Oedipus?"

"Fuck off, fuck off, fuck off," he spat, hitting him with the corner of his pillow after every swear, no longer tired. "I didn't fuck my parents."

“No, no but hear me out,” Ranboo said and Tommy groaned. He didn’t expect to hear theories about his myth in the dead of the night. “You didn’t tell anyone about your curse until me and frankly, you’re quite bad at figuring out your own myth. So what if this is unconscious self-sabotage and your way of avoiding fate?”

Tommy scowled at him, not liking the analytic expression on Ranboo’s face—it was the expression he normally had whenever they watched some crime documentary or BuzzFeed Unsolved.

“Oedipus’ whole moral was that you can’t avoid your destiny, no matter how hard you try to change it.”

“There was something about fucking your mother in it as well,” Tommy added.

“Yep, Oedipus *did* do that but thankfully for you, you don’t have a mother.”

“I’m not the mother-fucker, Ranboo. I’ve already gone through that existential crisis.”

“Fine.”

He understood the idea though; disregarding the whole incest part, it made sense. Oedipus had a prophesy that his parents thought they could change by abandoning their son, but the fate of him killing his father and marrying his mother came true—no matter how hard they tried to fight it. Tommy *did* tend to try to delay the inevitable. But it was different. He *did* want to figure out his myth, he did want to live.

Ranboo moved closer to him, leaning on the pillow Tommy threw at him.

“What about Greek Gods? Could you be one of them?” he couldn’t ignore the zeal of Ranboo’s tone—if it was anyone else, it would’ve rubbed him the wrong way, since it reminded him of being a science experiment, someone attempting to dissect him. Yet, the endearment in Ranboo’s voice was present as well.

“I have no idea,” Tommy answered. “I’ve only been the tragedies.”

“Hm. Well, Eros is a God and he had his tragedy with Psyche,” Ranboo said. “I’ll print out the ideas I have on my computer when I get home tomorrow.”

“Thank you for this,” he whispered, softly. If he had more courage, he could probably rant for hours to his friend about how much this meant to him, how much he appreciated *this*. It was different to Niki, who understood the curse and the pain it brought. Ranboo had no idea and couldn’t comprehend it all, yet he was still helping—all because he genuinely cared about Tommy. He didn’t know how he got so lucky.

Ranboo smiled, his eyes creasing. “I’d do anything for you man.” Tommy grinned at him. “Okay, maybe not *anything* knowing you, but you get the idea.”

He giggled and nodded, snuggling deeper into his covers. Ranboo fidgeted on the side of Tommy’s blow-up bed as if he had more questions. He moved to face the other more, he couldn’t deny his friend’s excitement.

“What else do you want to know?”

Ranboo paused for a moment. “Are you the only one with this... reincarnation thing?”

Tommy thought hard before he spoke. He didn’t want to reveal Niki without her consent, yet he wanted to share *something* with Ranboo.

“My brother was cursed as well,” he said, uneasy. It scared him to talk about this, but he trusted Ranboo.

“W. Soot.” Tommy nodded in confirmation. “Did he figure it out?”

“No,” he muttered, flashes of that apartment, of Estella flickered as he blinked. “He saw the power in it, the opportunity, the fun,” he spat with bitterness on his tongue. “If you had the power to be reborn and never face the consequences of your actions, then what’s stopping you from creating chaos in every life and leaving the second it starts to catch up to you?”

“Oh,” Ranboo said, his excitement faded and his face adopted something more tender, something that filled Tommy with the hope that *this* would be his chance to talk about this. The subject that shattered him into pieces and made him want to drown in the River Lethe to just forget it all.

“I’m sorry again for making you read my essay on your brother.”

“It’s fine.” His lip twitched. “He wasn’t always like that. He was a good person at some point.” Tommy wished for a time in the future where his next words didn’t lodge a stake into his heart. “L’Manberg ruined us both.”

He gulped and the openness in Ranboo’s face convinced him to continue. “I’m scared that if I don’t figure this life out, then I’ll end up like him,” his voice got quieter as if admitting it any louder would make it more real. “I have this anger building up inside of me Ranboo and I don’t know how to stop it.”

He felt it every day, he felt it expand at each moment where he stared down at empty pages in his notebook, not even knowing where to *start*. Dream kept taunting him that his myth, that the answer, was right in front of him. But he couldn’t see it. He wasn’t sure if he ever would.

“You’re bound to be angry, Tommy. You’ve been in this constant cycle of reliving lives after lives with no break in between. Of course you’ll be angry,” Ranboo consoled.

“You don’t get it,” he whimpered. “I feel like if I don’t break this curse, then I’ll become worse than everyone I didn’t want to be.”

A white mask with an ominous smiley face, an aggressive man with burly, brown hair that twisted into goat horns, and a cloaked figure next to stakes of rigged explosives came to mind. Each flare of a memory throbbed in his head.

Ranboo reached forward and grabbed Tommy’s hand. “There’s good in you. *That* won’t happen to you.”

“I’ve killed people before,” he blurted out, hating the loyalty in Ranboo’s eyes, something he didn’t deserve. “I have so much blood on my hands, Ranboo. What’s stopping me from repeating that in this life?”

Ranboo’s fingers threaded through his. He hated this.

“I was in a ditch, scared out of my mind and separated from Tobias during the Second L’Manberg War. Someone fell into that mud with me.” His eyes screwed shut. “They were wearing enemy colours, but they didn’t hurt me. It didn’t even seem like they knew I was there. The fear in their eyes... they were shell-shocked. I realised at that moment that some of the fighters on the Kingdom’s side didn’t want to be there. They weren’t fighting for George or their country. They were forced into battle and weren’t even there for their freedom or family like I was.”

He sniffed, his throat closed up. “But that didn’t stop me from driving a sword through their stomach and watching their white uniform bleed red.”

Ranboo’s thumb stroked Tommy’s hand, his touch felt as patient as him. “You were a victim of war.”

“Was I?” he faulted. “Or was I the creator of them?”

He remembered what Niki had said to him when she told him about her myth, about how she believed he caused all the conflict. Even though she tried to take it back, she was right.

Ranboo sat up and took out his phone. He shoved the screen in front of Tommy, the brightness stung his eyes.

“There’s this philosophical idea about the ship of Theseus,” he scrolled and clicked on a picture of a boat. Tommy frowned, he had seen that boat somewhere before but he couldn’t place it. “When Theseus returned to Athens from Crete after defeating the Minotaur, his ships components over time were replaced with new materials. The Theseus paradox is over whether an object that has had all its components replaced is the same object it was before.”

“What’s this got to do with anything?” he said, the face and blood dripping from that poor boy’s lips in that ditch still a prevalent image in his mind.

“Are you the same person Tommy Soot was?” Ranboo asked. “Wouldn’t every life you live after that rewrite the person you are?”

Tommy stayed silent.

“You’re different to who you were back in the 1500s.” Ranboo squeezed his hand. “I may not know the Tommy of his past lives, but *this* Tommy would never end up like his brother.”

He swallowed harshly and couldn’t stop Tobias’ words from rendering through him.

“As long as I can’t be the next Schlatt, then you can’t be the next—”

He ripped his hand away from Ranboo's and buried his head into his pillow, trying to drown out Tobias' voice.

"Tommy?" a hand rubbed against his back, the touch kept him from seeping deeper into memories he'd rather never relive.

He leaned closer and soaked up the comfort until he was sure he could open his eyes and not see anything other than Ranboo in front of him. "I'll try to be better than him."

"You already are," Ranboo whispered back with soft eyes and a timid smile.

"What the fuck are you two going on about?" Tubbo yawned groggily. Peace coursed through him, only Tubbo could shrug the weight off Tommy's chest just by waking up.

"Nothing, Tubs."

"Then shut the fuck up and go back to sleep."

Both boys chuckled and Tubbo dashed a pillow down at them.

Time passed and Tommy struggled to fall asleep. He counted each star that illuminated on the ceiling before someone whacked him on the shoulder, disturbing his count. He lifted his head and Tubbo stared at him, his hair all messed up.

"Why'd you hit me?"

"You good?" Tubbo asked, his voice gentle.

The red bandana was still tied around Tubbo's neck. Tommy smiled. "Yeah, yeah, I'm good."

"Then fucking sleep, stop rustling the covers."

"You are the most comforting force there is, Tubster."

"I don't appreciate sarcasm at three in the morning," Tubbo yawned again. "What were you talking about with Boo earlier?"

"I'll explain it to you one day."

"Sus."

"Shut the fuck up."

"Sussy ba—" Tommy smacked his hand over Tubbo's mouth and Tubbo licked it.

Tommy screeched out in disgust and Tubbo laughed loudly. Ranboo woke up and huffed from beside them, making them laugh harder. They probably woke up Tubbo's entire household but neither of them cared. Tommy concluded that he liked bench-trio sleepovers.

Chapter 20

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It was the thirty-first of March and Tommy had a plan. All he needed for his plan to work was for Phil to let him go.

“No chance,” Phil said as he put another packet of Walkers crisps into the shopping basket.

“Why not?” Tommy whined. Now, he *did* have self-respect, but that wouldn’t stop him from causing a scene in the middle of the snacks aisle of Tesco’s.

“Tommy, you’re fifteen.”

“That means I get a cheaper train ticket.”

“As if you’d buy a train ticket to begin with. You’d probably jump over the ticket barriers.”

Tommy scowled at him for assuming such a horrid thing (that he would totally do). “I’ve seen people do it on YouTube, it’s possible.”

“This is why I won’t let you go to London.”

“Fine,” he resigned and threw a packet of strawberry laces into Phil’s hands. “I’m still going round Tubbo’s tomorrow though. We need to finish season seven of Grey’s Anatomy.”

Phil nodded and walked them into the drinks aisle.

Normally Tommy would feel immense guilt for lying to Phil, the creator of Minecraft and only example of a good man, but he needed to do this. If he had to lie about being interested in a hospital show with too many fucking seasons to make this happen, then so be it. He had planned a journey to London with Tubbo and Ranboo for tomorrow, which he would do with or without Phil’s permission.

The number of days to his birthday had gotten shorter. He wanted to make every day count, whether that was creating more memories with his friends or being the cause for Phil’s blood pressure to rise.

The next day, he left the house with a bag packed with his Christmas money and Wilbur’s credit card (he was also wearing one of the sweatshirts Wilbur got him so the act of stealing cancelled out). He was ready to make this the best day out for Tubbo and Ranboo that they would ever experience. This was for them, after all.

“Are you sure we won’t get in trouble for this?” Ranboo asked for the twentieth time as they boarded the train to Westminster.

“Ranboo, you already are on thin ice for wasting our money.”

“It’s not my fault they didn’t believe I was young enough for a child’s ticket!”

“Wow, that must suck,” Tubbo grumbled. He was pissed off that the lady at the desk believed Tubbo to be young enough for a child’s ticket despite him being the oldest and one year over the child ticket age.

“Grow taller then,” Tommy said. It was simple advice, people *chose* to be short.

“As soon as this train opens for the next stop, I will throw you out of those doors.”

“Can you even reach the button to open them?”

Thankfully, the train began to move before Tubbo could proceed with his plans of murdering Tommy.

Ranboo sat in between the two of them and asked, “What are we even going to do in London?”

“Yeah, you haven’t told us anything.”

“It’s a surprise,” Tommy beamed.

Tubbo turned to Ranboo as if this was going to be the last time he’d ever be on a train.

“We’re going to return home in body bags.”

“They’d struggle to find a body bag to fit me. You’d be fine though, Tubbo.”

“What the fuck?”

Tommy dragged them across the London bridge, ignoring Tubbo and Ranboo’s discussion of how swimmable the River Thames looked.

He stopped in front of their destination with a grin plastered on his face.

“Tommy, I was joking about the body bag comment earlier on the train. Please don’t tell me this is real.”

“Welcome to The London Dungeon.”

He tugged them by their arms closer to the entrance. Two hooded statues taller than Ranboo, with scythes and axes, stood by the half-drawn gated walkway. Blood covered the inside walls, skeletons were inside cages, and a Medieval jester with a cleaver lodged into the man’s

head kept trying to jump-scare people (the special effects makeup was a bit *too* realistic—especially as Tommy had seen before what having a weapon impaled through your skull looked like up-close thanks to Icarus).

“Is it too late to go home?” Ranboo prodded as he pointed at the writing carved on top of the entrance archway. “I’m not feeling like entering at my own peril.”

“Why is there a fake dead body in a wheelbarrow?” Tubbo asked, tempted to reach out and slap the face of the body.

Tommy stopped Tubbo from attacking the prop. “Who said it’s fake?”

“My own eyes?”

“Shut up and get in the line, big man.” He pushed them forward and joined the queue.

“When you told us about your idea to go to London, I expected something... different,” Tubbo said. “Maybe Hyde Park? The Boris bikes? Not a tourist attraction representing the gruesome parts of British history.”

Tommy gripped onto his friend’s shoulders, holding him still. “There are torture rooms, Tubbo. Torture rooms.”

“Alright, I’m interested,” Tubbo replied, disregarding the worried look on Ranboo’s face (he didn’t trust Tubbo in *any* torture rooms—whether it was a tourist attraction or not). “But can we go Hyde Park later on?”

“We can do anything you want today.” Tubbo opened his mouth and Tommy could guess what he was about to suggest. “Besides going to museums. If I wanted to look at old things, I would’ve stayed home with Phil.”

“The man is in his mid-thirties, Tommy, he’s not that old,” Ranboo defended.

“Anyone over the age of eighteen to me is considered elderly,” Tommy said as the three approached the desk. He gave the booking information to the lady, who had her throat all bloody and ripped out.

They followed the Medieval Jester to a dark room, with the other people in their tour group, and Tubbo attempted many times to grab the clever currently embedded in the man’s head. Despite Ranboo explaining to him many times that it was a prop, it didn’t deter Tubbo. It took the man jump-scaring Tubbo to death for him to stop annoying the employees.

Before the boat ride to the tour rooms, they had the option to have their picture taken in a guillotine and Tommy would never pass up the opportunity to put Ranboo in one of the holds.

“Ranboo, get in there,” he ordered and gripped onto the rope connected to the unfortunately fake blade at the top of the device.

He, of course, bought the pictures that made it look like he was about to behead no one other than Ranboo Beloved whilst Tubbo stood up his side smiling.

“That felt like a targeted attack,” Ranboo complained as the three returned to the group for the boat ride.

“That’s because it was.”

Ranboo huffed loudly and entered the boat; The London Dungeon tour began.

“I still don’t get why we got kicked out,” Ranboo grumbled with his jeans still wet from the boat ride thirty minutes prior.

They were in the London Underground, not particularly knowing which train to take. Tubbo had a pen that was designed to look like a needle injection with fake blood in it, which he had stolen from The London Dungeon gift shop when they were forced off the property.

“You kept saying ‘Dad?’ to every single fucking skeleton we saw. And even the Grim Reaper guy!” Tommy shouted.

“And it doesn’t even make sense. You’ve never had a dad!” Tubbo added.

“I thought that was the joke,” Tommy said, confused.

“He has two mums, Tommy.”

“Oh.” Tommy stopped to high-five Ranboo.

“I hate you guys. We didn’t even get to finish the Jack the Ripper part,” Tubbo proclaimed as he clicked his injection pen.

“Look, I’m not a judgemental person, but I’m judging you. You were too excited for him to show up,” Tommy said.

“He was interesting!”

“Didn’t he kill and mutilate innocent women?” Ranboo asked.

“Exactly! He’s a wrong’un. And by association, Tubbo is also a wrong’un now because he was excited to see the serial killer—”

Tubbo pounced forward, his hands reaching to tackle Tommy to the ground, and chased him along the train platform until Tommy ran into an open train. The doors closed shut seconds after he got inside.

As the train moved, he flipped Tubbo off. Then he remembered that he didn’t know where this train was going. Being separated from your friends and lost on a moving train were

consequences of making Tubbo angry for his obsession with British serial killers.

He looked up to see that this was the Jubilee Line stop and took a picture of it, giggling to himself.

Year 13 Resit:

Tommy: [image attached] I didn't know they named a trainline after your song

Wilbur: toms wtf are u doing in London???

Tommy: don't tell Phil :D

Wilbur: get me a souvenir and deal

Tommy: alright, I'll use your credit card

Wilbur: my WHAT

He got off at the next stop and eventually reunited with Tubbo and Ranboo in front of an arcade and amusement centre, a mile away from The London Dungeon (that they were now forever banned from for public disturbance and harassment). He didn't think he was gone for *that* long but Ranboo had a shopping bag in his hands and Tubbo was wearing an 'I love London' hat.

"Why did you buy Britain's merch?" Tommy asked as they walked into the first floor of the arcade.

"They're a good content creator."

"If you actually looked into the colonial history of Britain and the British Empire then you'd want to rethink that—" Ranboo began to say before the two British people scowled at him.

"Fine, fine, enjoy the merch with ignorance."

After Tommy managed to win a stuffed pig from a claw machine—which he gave to Ranboo because it was ugly—and Tubbo had satisfied his gambling addiction with the weird 2p machines, Ranboo pulled them towards a photo booth.

"Can we take pictures in there?" Ranboo asked. His sunglasses were off since the arcade had dark lighting and as much as Tommy wanted to abuse the claw machines more, he couldn't deny the pleading in Ranboo's eyes.

"You bought a polaroid camera today and you want to use *more* money for pictures?" Tubbo protested, frowning at him as he sipped on his blue slushie.

“We can use the booth to stand the camera up so we can take our own.” Ranboo yanked them closer.

“Let’s finesse capitalism with photography.”

“That makes no sense,” Ranboo said, causing Tommy to glare at him. “You know what? Yep, no more capitalism.”

They got into the booth and Tommy forced Ranboo to put the pig on the floor because he refused to have pictures taken with it.

“Don’t exclude Michael.”

“You’ve already named the ugly fucker?”

“Stop insulting my son.”

“*Our* son,” Tubbo corrected.

“Just put the pig down and set up the camera, dickheads.” Tommy sighed.

They took many pictures—though most of them had Tubbo attacking Tommy. One of them included Tommy and Tubbo flipping each other off with Ranboo holding up a peace sign, and then Tubbo put Tommy into a headlock whilst Ranboo snuck Michael into the frame.

Needless to say, the photos weren’t going on *any* social media site.

“One picture with the mask off, come on Boo.”

“But imagine the mystery these pictures will cause if we soak them in resin. Future civilisations will be wondering why this random boy is wearing a facemask pre-pandemic,” Ranboo said.

“Pre-pandemic?”

“Don’t question it,” Ranboo shrugged them off. “But fine, one with it off.”

The final picture was of the three of them huddled together, smiling brightly at the polaroid camera (with Michael in his deserved place: on the floor).

Tommy held the printed photo in his hands. “Can I keep this one?”

He wondered if the picture would stay in his notebook after his death if he stuck it onto a page. This way, he wouldn’t forget their faces.

“Aww, of course Tommy wants the nice one,” Tubbo teased, dodging a smack to the head.

“What the fuck is that supposed to mean?”

“Little soft, wholesome boy—”

“Die, literally die. I could kill you right now.”

“But you won’t,” Tubbo taunted.

He shook his head, laughing. “No, I won’t.”

“Tommy’s being nice for once?”

“I didn’t say you were safe from me, Ranboo.”

“Welp.”

After wasting more money (Wilbur’s money) on arcade machines, they travelled to Hyde Park and sat on a bench with ice cream. Tommy failed to hide his disgust over Ranboo choosing mint chocolate ice cream—he was a strong believer that those who liked mint in desserts didn’t brush their teeth.

“What else should we do?” Tubbo asked as he attempted to feed a squirrel a chocolate flake, only to be stopped by Ranboo.

“Tubbo, don’t give the animal chocolate, it’ll die.”

“I’ve always wanted to steal something from Tesco’s,” Tommy offered.

Ranboo let out a loud sigh. “Let’s *not* do that.”

“I didn’t know I was friends with pussies.”

“You do know this, you tell us this every single day.”

“Oh yeah.” The three laughed and Tommy turned to look at both of them. “Is there anything wild on you guys’ bucket lists?”

“Why do you have a bucket list? You’re not going to die anytime soon,” Tubbo asked, his head tilted.

Tommy cleared his throat and avoided his eyes. The ice cream cone felt colder in his hands.

An awkward silence followed.

“Why do you act like that whenever death is mentioned?” Tubbo said with an edge to his tone, as if this was something he wanted to get off his chest.

Tommy stayed quiet, biting the inside of his cheek.

“At Clementine’s party you—”

Ranboo stood up abruptly. “I’m going to get a drink from the ice cream truck.”

Tubbo scooted closer. Tommy flinched as his shoulder brushed against his. The silence continued, though it was tenser.

“Are you sick?” Tubbo whispered, hesitant.

Tommy paused for a moment before looking back at him.

He *did* want to tell his closest friend about his inevitable death. After all, he promised Tubbo that he would one day. But he couldn’t today. Not on the day where he wanted to forget all his troubles—and do it healthily this time (no alcohol included). Informing your best friend that you were destined to die due to your own stupidity over a myth that practically controlled every event in your life wasn’t good news to give.

“No. I’m not sick,” Tommy muttered. He closed his eyes and shivered in his seat. “It’s fine, Tubs. I’m not going to die on you guys any time soon.”

The lie felt like acid on his tongue. It would’ve been better for him to not say anything at all, rather than empty assurances and false promises.

“You better fucking not. I still need my Best Man at my platonic wedding.”

A bitter-sweet warmth burned his heart. “You’d choose me as your Best Man?”

“Of course I would.” A smile crept upon him.

Tommy was tempted to just hug the shit out of him right there. But Tubbo didn’t really like hugs. Instead, he fixed the twisted red bandana around Tubbo’s neck and leaned back, proud.

Tubbo glanced down, grinning, and tugged on Tommy’s. He laughed as Tommy yelped at how it almost strangled him.

“Clingy,” Tommy said.

Tubbo let the comment slide.

“I don’t know what’s up with you, especially recently,” Tubbo eventually said. “But just know, I’m here for you, man.”

“I know,” Tommy mumbled, scared his voice would break if he were any louder. “Trust me, I know.”

Tubbo patted Tommy on the shoulder, reminding him of Phil. He chuckled at Tubbo’s awkwardness but appreciated the gesture, nevertheless.

“I want to get my ears illegally pierced,” Ranboo said, interrupting the moment between the two.

“Illegally, you say?” Tommy said, smirking. “Let’s do this shit then.”

It took them a while to find a tattoo and piercing parlour. When they did find one, they were immediately turned away because for some stupid reason minors can't get piercings without parental consent. So Tommy did the natural thing and found an overaged woman on the street who he paid to pretend to be Ranboo's mother. Sharon happily agreed for a decent price.

Tommy and Tubbo watched from the waiting chairs as Ranboo chose the piercing he wanted at the desk.

"What if he gets the Hello Kitty one?" Tubbo said as he pointed to the glass showcase.

"I can hear you, and no!" Ranboo yelled.

"It's probably to do with toxic masculinity," Tubbo whispered to Tommy.

"Do you even know what that means?"

"Nope."

Tommy wheezed.

"Never change, Tubs."

Ranboo sat in the chair as the man approached him with a needle. To Tommy's dismay, Ranboo didn't scream and cry like a little baby as the man pierced his ears. As much as he valued his friend, it would've made an entertaining vlog. Ranboo ended up getting a black stud in one ear and a white one in the other—he kept defending his choice of colours by saying it was part of his 'brand'.

Tommy's phone vibrated in his pocket.

4/3: Family Chat

Phil: Tommy, do you want to tell me why when I go over to Tubbo's house, his parents tell me they thought you and Tubbo were at ours?

Tommy: [image attached]

Wilbur: pls don't tell me Ranboo is getting his ears done in Claire's

also mf, isn't that illegal??

Phil: You're in for it when you get home.

Technoblade: Get some more tattoos whilst you're at it.

Phil: If you do that, you're double dead.

Tommy: glad you approve of our day trip, Phil!

Phil: Take the next train home

Tommy, I mean it

Answer your phone

I can literally see you reading these messages

Tommy grinned and switched off his phone.

“Do you sell temporary tattoos here as well?”

If Tommy knew that his question would result in Tubbo leaving the tattoo and piercing parlour with a sleeve of dinosaur tattoos, then he wouldn't have asked.

“I'm hungry. Can we get meal deals at Tesco's?” Tubbo said, still admiring his temporary tattoos.

“We could go to any restaurant or a fancy café in London, and you want a meal deal?” Tommy frowned.

“What can I say? I'm a humble and modest man.”

“Ugh, fine, Tesco's it is.”

They ended up stealing a shopping cart from Tesco's.

For legal reasons, the cart was unattended and it was Tubbo's idea, not his.

Exhilaration pulsed inside of him as the trio rushed through the streets of London with the stolen shopping cart. He leapt inside and gusts of winds blew back his hair. His face flushed as he shouted at the top of his lungs. Strings of his laughter echoed the streets, followed by Ranboo gushing that they were going to be caught and Tubbo yelling for Ranboo to push them faster.

“Onwards my friends! Across the bridge!” he cackled. Adrenaline pumped through him, but the good kind—the best kind.

He truly felt alive.

He peered up the dark sky as cars sped past them. The same crown-shaped constellation gleamed back down at him. He leaned back on the handlebar and embraced the harsh breeze that bit at his nose. Giddiness overwhelmed him.

At this moment, nothing could remove the smile off his lips.

As they reached the end of the bridge and were certain that the Tesco's security guard had stopped chasing them, they stopped on the bank of the River Thames.

They sat under dimmed streetlights—Tommy and Tubbo were still inside the shopping cart whilst Ranboo was on the grass.

“Can we use the shopping cart as a boat over the Thames?” Tommy asked.

“There are severe flaws in your plan,” Ranboo said, his face furrowed with confusion.

“Not necessarily. I think we can fit all three of us in it.”

“I was more referring to the *holes* in the cart.”

“Shit.”

“Plus if we went into the River Thames, we'd come out with every single disease known to man.”

“Even hemorrhoids?” Tommy asked, sounding horrified, causing Ranboo to put his head in his hands.

“You'd need a doughnut pillow for your butt if you got that,” Tubbo commented.

“Don't talk about my arse.”

“You literally brought up hemorrhoids—”

“Both of you, please shut up,” Ranboo begged.

“Damn, the guy gets his ears pierced and suddenly thinks he's the shit.”

“Toxic masculinity,” Tubbo agreed.

Tommy burst out laughing.

“That's not what that term—” Tommy pointed his finger at Ranboo threateningly.

“Never explain it to him.”

Ranboo sighed and got out his polaroid camera, already done with this conversation.

“You in your photography arc?”

Ranboo smiled and pointed the camera at him. “And you're in your model arc.”

He took the picture and showed Tommy the result. “How do I look so damn good whilst in a shopping cart?”

“Pinterest would eat that picture up.”

Tommy snatched it out of his hands. “Too bad. It’s going on my wall in my room.”

The nightlife of London resonated around them as the trio settled into a comfortable silence. He opened his bag and admired the many pictures Ranboo had taken throughout the day, his favourite being Tubbo attempting to get onto a Boris bike with his short legs. Though, he couldn’t deny the softness he felt whenever he came across a picture of Tubbo or Ranboo smiling at the camera.

“When should we head back?” Tommy asked, quietly.

“Soon. But not right now,” Tubbo said as he stretched out in the cart and stared up at the sky. “I like this.”

“Yeah, we should do this more often,” Ranboo agreed.

Tommy smiled at them.

This is what he wanted for today. For his friends to enjoy themselves, and it seemed like he achieved that.

Tubbo fell asleep on the train ride home and Tommy didn’t have the heart to annoy him by shaking him awake every time the train stopped at a station. Though, he definitely would’ve if Tubbo didn’t look exhausted.

“Oh guys, I almost forgot.” Ranboo pulled his bag onto his lap and picked out two little gift bags. He passed it to Tommy and stared at the asleep Tubbo. “I’ll give it to him when I get to his.”

Tommy frowned at it but opened it anyway. It was a silver locket with a crown engraved on the front.

“A necklace?”

“Open it.”

Inside was a picture of Ranboo with the caption ‘My Beloved’ below it.

Tommy gaped at it. “Oh my God.”

“If you two have bandanas, I have a locket.”

Tommy didn’t hesitate to tie it around his neck.

“You really went all out for this.”

“I wanted to be included,” Ranboo joked.

His cheeks warmed. “You’ll always be included.”

“Soft Tommy is back.”

“I take it back, I will purposely isolate you from everything now,” he quipped, making Ranboo chuckle.

Tommy fiddled with the chain, staring down at the locket with a permanent smile.

“Cheers boob boy.”

“That’s it,” Ranboo snapped half-heartedly, “I want the locket back.”

“Nope. No take-backsies.”

“How old are you?”

Tommy grinned at him. “Well technically, I’ve been fifteen in every life, despite Sisyphus which was like thirteen. So do the maths for me.”

“Mentally you are four, okay got it.”

“You’re a wrong’un for hanging out with a four-year-old, Ranboo.”

“Can this train be any slower?” he exclaimed loudly as the train started to move again.

Tommy laughed and tucked the locket over his bandana. Reminders of his best friends hung around his neck and he liked it that way.

The warmth inside Tommy died when Phil picked them up from the station. The air inside of the car was cold.

Tommy sat in the back and kept staring at Phil in the rear-view mirror. The man looked pissed. But he had to do this today, even if it meant he was grounded until his birthday and may have thoroughly annoyed his foster father.

He switched his phone back on and the date glaring back taunted him. It was the first day of April and he had nine days to live.

His eyes stung. He didn’t know what to feel or even what to do.

The second Ranboo and Tubbo left the car, it hit him. This might've been the last day trip or full-day they may ever have together. The last time they'd fuck around and act like careless teenagers who believed the world was at their fingertips and that *everything* revolved around them.

He won't ever be able to see the London night sky with the dim streetlights and faint stars providing the only source of light. The comfort his two best friends at his side bought drowned out the cold winds.

Death loomed over a cursed boy who just wanted to *live*.

A tear dropped onto his phone screen, landing on the date.

Loneliness overwhelmed him. Despite being at the peak of his life, enjoying his youth a couple of moments ago, he had never felt more alone.

The car stopped in the driveway of his home—was it even his home? Or just a house he was waiting to die in?

He ambled inside, following Phil who wouldn't even look at him. He took off his coat and sat down where Phil gestured for him to sit.

He clutched the locket in his hands, hating the expression on Phil's face. Tommy didn't deserve to be cared about by Phil, or by anyone. He shouldn't matter *this* much to these people, especially when he'd be gone soon.

His eyes stung again. He rubbed them with his sleeve harshly.

He didn't want to be another family member the Crafts would have to mourn. Phil had already lost a wife. A son shouldn't be buried in the same graveyard.

His yearning for a family was selfish. He made these people get attached to him and for what? For him to just die and leave their family with an empty slot, someone they couldn't replace no matter how hard they tried, no matter how many other kids they may adopt or foster. It wouldn't feel the same.

He couldn't do that to them. Not to the people who welcomed him inside and treated him as if he was their own.

"Why'd you go even though I told you not to?" Phil asked. Even when the man was pissed at him, there was still a degree of care in his voice. His concern outweighed his anger.

Tommy peered across at him.

"I wanted to have fun with my friends," Tommy jeered, trying to ignore the fumes inside of him just waiting for an open flame—for anything to latch onto. "I wanted to create memories with them, is that so much to ask for?"

He knew he was being unreasonable and a fucking asshole for treating Phil this way but he couldn't help it. If this family wasn't going to drive him away, then he'd do it for them. He

didn't care if every fibre in his body hated doing this, it was something he had to do.

"Yes!" Phil retorted, his mouth twisted into a scowl. "Yes, it is when it means you go to London alone, without an adult, when you're fifteen!"

Tommy shrunk more into himself. He didn't want Phil to be angry at him. The last thing he ever wanted to do was disappoint him, and yet here he sat, cowering in his seat, facing the repercussions of his own stupid actions all because he didn't want to die unhappy.

Silent tears wet his face.

Phil exhaled deeply. "Mate, I get you're upset but this is something I need to... do something about."

Tommy couldn't stop the words from leaving his mouth. "Send me back then."

"What? No—"

"If I'm *something* you need to deal with, a problem for you, then send me back," he seethed, his jaw clenched and hands shaking. "I'll be gone soon anyway, might as well get it done with."

"Tommy, what are you talking about?" Phil looked at him so *softly* and he wished for his death to come sooner.

He breathed out harshly, his chest compressing against itself.

"I shouldn't be here," he wept, closing in on himself. "I'm not a part of your family and—"

"You are," Phil argued, voice stern and confident, only making Tommy crumble even further.

"I'm not!" his voice raised as his heartbeat did. "I don't deserve to be. I'm just this stupid fucking foster kid that you let into your house and causes you shit. I've had so many second chances when I shouldn't and *this* is what I shouldn't have."

"Tommy..."

"No, stop it!" he stood up, his chair fell backwards onto the floor. "You guys treat me like... you treat me like I'm—" he cut himself off and his blurred gaze stared into Phil's blue eyes. He couldn't help but imagine how dimmed they would be after Tommy's death.

As Phil moved over to him, Tommy jerked backwards and hugged himself tightly.

"Don't care about me. Please, just don't. There's no fucking point, don't—"

He whimpered as a hand touched his shoulder. A warm grip that would've brought comfort to him but now only pain followed.

"Tommy," Phil whispered, voice gentle and he practically melted. He couldn't do this.

"Listen to me, okay?" the man placed another hand on Tommy's shoulder. "I love you like

you're my own son."

His eyes watered and his head pounded. He didn't want to hear this, not now, not ever.

"Don't say that," he spat harshly, hating how his body shook. "Don't fucking say that!" he ripped Phil's hands off him.

"I don't know why you're acting out, Tommy, but I need you to know that."

"You shouldn't," Tommy sobbed, his voice breaking. He ran upstairs, ignoring Phil's shouts for him to come back. He wiped his face with his trembling hands and tried to forget Phil's words, his phrase that would haunt him in the void until his next rebirth.

He loved this family and he was a fool to forget what happened to those he cared about. He collapsed onto his bed and huddled under the covers.

His cries echoed the dark room and guilt flooded through him. Phil had done nothing but be nice and loving towards him and he treated the man like that—

Tobias was right. He really was *selfish*.

The door opened.

"You going to tell me why you were shouting at Dad?" Wilbur asked, his tone patient and kind. Something Tommy didn't want to hear right now.

He sniffed and turned to the other side, facing the wall. He clutched his locket tighter.

"Goodnight, Wilbur," he dismissed, hoping for this day to end already.

He didn't hear the door close.

"If something's bothering you, we can—"

"Leave me the fuck alone Wilbur," he snapped with more heat, digging himself into a pit of more guilt.

The door finally shut.

Chapter End Notes

fanart for this chapter!

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Chapter 21

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It turned out that crying himself to sleep at the ripe time of midnight had severe consequences on Tommy's appearance.

As he peered into the bathroom mirror, an exhausted boy with bloodshot eyes and a red nose stared back. There were multiple other things wrong with him; whenever he attempted to smile, it never reached his eyes, which housed a dull blue. To put it simply, he looked as pathetic as he felt.

He tightened the green bandana around his neck and secured the latch on the Ranboo locket, preparing himself for breakfast before school started.

It was going to be awkward. He had pissed off and snapped at two of the three other members of this household. He one-hundred percent deserved to be beaten to shit by Phil—even though the man would never raise a hand to a child, especially his own.

“I love you like you’re my own son—”

He tugged at his hair. He had *yearned* for that adoration, that expression of unconditional love, for years, centuries even. In every single life, he had attempted and failed to fill his desire for a father, for someone to show him how a dad should act, as his first life instead displayed the opposite. He wanted to know what it meant to have a father figure that didn’t neglect and kill the only person that stepped up to make sure he didn’t die of hypothermia in the cold, winter nights and kissed him on the forehead before sleep took him.

And he finally found that person. He found Phil.

Yet now that he had him, he didn’t know what to do. The tattoo on his wrist did nothing but serve as a cruel reminder that in a matter of days, he would lose the same person he had searched centuries for.

It hurt. Stung more than it should.

As he packed his bag, he put Henry inside as well. He needed a comfort item with him today. He walked down the stairs slowly, dreading every step. He turned the corner and all three of them sat already at the table. Techno was the only one who seemed happy to see him.

“And the dramatic prick has woken up,” Wilbur greeted, his tone wasn’t as light-hearted as it normally was when the two made fun of each other. It was harsher, too real. “Are you done with your temper tantrum or can I finish my bacon?”

“So you’re the only one allowed to be an immature little bitch and cry over your problems?” Tommy snapped, mimicking Wilbur’s tone, though with more edge.

“I wouldn’t call you unnecessarily shouting at Dad ‘crying over your problems’,” Wilbur hissed.

“Have you suddenly forgotten that time you yelled at him in the garden after he was worried for your mental health? Because I sure haven’t,” Tommy quipped back.

Wilbur glared at him. But didn’t say anything back. He shrugged, his shoulders tense, and stabbed his bacon with his knife.

Tommy’s fists clenched under the table, his heart pounded. As much as he was prepared to turn a new leaf during this breakfast, if *this* was how Wilbur was acting, then the fucker deserved to be shouted at a bit more.

Cutlery scratching against the plates echoed the living room.

Techno cleared his throat, interrupting the tense silence. “How was London?”

“I stole a shopping cart and got banned for life from a tourist attraction,” Tommy replied, his eyes still glued on Wilbur, who was practically seething as he stuffed his English breakdown into his mouth.

“I didn’t expect anything less,” Techno said. He sounded too casual after witnessing the little bitch-fest between him and Wilbur, but Techno always prided himself on being unbothered by everything. Surprisingly, the man’s nonchalance made Tommy calmer. “Did you get any more tattoos then?”

Tommy rolled up his sleeve to show the temporary tattoo he had. Since Tubbo and Ranboo had stolen all the ‘cool’ tattoos, he was left with a stupid flower, a *Ranunculus* Butterfly.

“It’s nice.” Techno nodded approvingly at him. Tommy guessed Techno liked the pink colour.

“We just going to ignore the elephant in the room then or...?” Wilbur snarked, that annoying tone still in his voice. The more the breakfast went on, the more it dawned on Tommy that this was a nineteen-year-old, who was currently acting younger than him.

Phil, staying quiet, took another sip of his drink. He hadn’t even acknowledged Tommy’s existence this entire time. He wasn’t quite sure if that was water in Phil’s glass or straight vodka.

“Oh yeah, thanks for the reminder,” Techno said and he faced Tommy. “My fencing tournament is later today.”

“Cool,” Tommy commented. “Do you want me to help you get set up for the matches?”

“It’s almost as if you read my mind,” Techno said, causing the corners of Tommy’s mouth to upturn into a timid smile.

He didn’t know why Techno was doing this—the man usually stuck to few words and bullied Wilbur during breakfast meals—but he appreciated it, nonetheless. It was his own fault, after

all, that Wilbur and Phil were acting this way towards him and he deserved it. Last night struck a bone with the two of them.

“That’s not what I meant and you know it, Technoblade,” Wilbur said with narrowed eyes.

“Then what are you referring to?” Techno tilted his head, almost mocking Wilbur. “Because if you’re talking about your idea of forcing a foster child with a history of problematic households to talk about why he may be acting a bit *off* today, then leave that to the side.”

Wilbur scowled and gazed down at his breakfast in shame.

“We have to talk about your punishment at some point, Tommy,” Phil finally spoke, although he didn’t stare at Tommy as he did. Almost as if he couldn’t stomach the sight of him.

“I think me driving him to school will be punishing enough,” Techno said.

“You’re taking me to school?” Tommy asked.

“Yeah, and I’m using Wilbur’s car. He’ll have to walk.”

“What the fuck?”

Techno scoffed, “Perhaps with this time alone walking you can think over why your ideas around Tommy are stupid.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Oh poor you, he snapped at you last night but—”

“Boys, enough,” Phil interjected, his hand rubbing the creases on his forehead.

Tommy squirmed in his seat. He wasn’t used to Techno defending him.

“I would’ve thought that you’d listen to the only other person here who experienced foster care when something like this happens,” Techno bit back. “Lay off on the punishment for now.”

“Techno—”

“Phil,” he interrupted. “He messed up, broke multiple house rules and went against your word, but he also had a breakdown at midnight and frankly, looks like a mess. Let him breathe for a bit.”

“I am right here,” Tommy muttered, offended.

“Shut it,” both Techno and Phil said at the same time. Tommy held up his hands in mocked surrender.

“Let him come out with us later tonight and relax,” Techno urged.

“Fine.” Phil caved into Techno’s words, his head in his hands. “Fine but he’s grounded.”

“I am right in front of you!” he exclaimed.

“You’re grounded,” Phil repeated, facing Tommy this time.

“Nevermind, I’m not here.”

“You can eat the rest of your breakfast in the car,” Techno said as he got up from his seat.

“No eating in my car,” Wilbur demanded.

“You better start walking to school, Wilbur. You wouldn’t want to be late,” Techno taunted as he walked out the house. Tommy grabbed a slice of toast and put on his coat, following him to the car.

“You are so fucking cool,” Tommy gaped.

“Winning arguments with Wilbur always ups my ego.”

And with that, Techno drove him to school—and managed to not hit anyone (unlike Wilbur). Though, he did play weird music. It was a weird Minecraft parody of a Taylor Swift song that Techno knew word-for-word.

Tommy made his way back from P.E with a bruised ankle to the bench. He hated hockey with a burning passion. It was only fun when he was the one attacking people’s legs and not when it was the other way round. Plus, Daniel had a vendetta against him ever since he sprayed diluted hydrochloric acid over the fucker during chemistry a couple of months ago so the entire lesson was a targeted attack.

He sat down on the bench for break time and waited for Ranboo to turn up. Tubbo was currently facing the consequences of almost causing a fire to happen in the science block, so his break time for the next month was spent with the chemistry teacher.

Someone slammed a plastic folder onto the table with a loud smack, causing him to jump out of his seat.

“Jesus fucking Christ, Ranboo,” he gasped. Ranboo laughed and took the seat next to him.

“It’s what you deserve after getting me grounded by my mum,” Ranboo said. “Though, she does like Michael so thanks for giving him to me.”

“I don’t give a shit about your ugly pig son.” Tommy stared at the stack of paper files inside the plastic folder. “What is this?”

“This, my good friend, is a fact file I made on every single Greek tragedy mentioned on the Wikipedia pages and any Greek tragedy literature.”

“Holy shit.” He flicked through the pages, surprised at how much effort Ranboo put into this.

“I would’ve included pictures but my printing money has already skyrocketed because of this.”

Tommy was still gawking at it.

“I will only say this once, Ranboo, but I appreciate you as a person and you are an honorary Brit to me,” Tommy said earnestly, a bright smile on his lips. He had never imaged that *this* would happen if he told someone about his curse, that they would go to this much effort just so he could be free.

“Thank you, Tommy,” Ranboo chuckled. “Now, I need you to tell me every single event that has happened in your life so I can do a process of elimination.”

“You’re asking me to trauma dump on you in the middle of break?”

“Yep. Everything. Speed-run telling me your tragic past.”

Tommy blinked at him. “Uh, I don’t know anything about my actual parents, but my major foster family exploited children and their son was abusive. They had him locked up half the time. I betrayed them by turning them into the police and now I’m here with a new foster family,” he paused. “I don’t think you need to know my other past lives because this is pretty tame compared to that.”

“You just admitted that you were in an abusive foster home and exploited at a young age,” Ranboo dead-panned. “And you’re saying *this* wasn’t even the worst parts of your history?”

“Dude, I’ve legit went through wars before.”

“Oh yeah,” Ranboo mumbled. Tommy flicked his forehead.

Ranboo opened the plastic folder and spread out the pages. “I have one idea so far.” He hovered over a file. “What if you’re Paris?”

“Oui oui.”

“Not the capital of France, you idiot,” Ranboo scoffed. He shoved the piece of paper in front of Tommy. “This guy.”

Tommy picked up the paper.

Paris of Toy, aka the douchebag who caused the Trojan War all because he was a bit too horny. He was chosen by Zeus to pick which Goddess out of Hera, Athena and Aphrodite were the most beautiful. And of course, the horny fucker went with Aphrodite as she promised him Helen of Troy in return. A married woman with a husband prepared to go to war to get her back.

“I don’t see the similarities. I didn’t cause any wars in this life,” Tommy said.

“I was more thinking of how you weren’t raised by your biological parents, similar to Paris. His mother had a dream that he was some bad omen and would cause the fall of Troy, so he was raised by different people.”

“You calling me a bad omen?”

“No, I’m saying your parents abandoned you,” he stated, bluntly.

“Well,” Tommy huffed, stumped. “But what about the foster family thing? Was his new family dickheads as well?”

“He was left for dead by his biological parents and nursed by bears, which may be a topical reference to how bad your fostering agency is.”

“I don’t know,” he said. “The whole causing a war thing seems pretty important in his myth and I don’t think I can cause a war in nine days.”

“Why nine days?”

Tommy’s stomach dropped. He forgot he didn’t tell Ranboo the entire truth of his curse, that he didn’t have until his eventual deathbed to figure out his myth, but instead had until his sixteenth birthday.

He had to bullshit his way out of that. “Wasn’t Paris sixteen when he caused the Trojan War?”

“No? I don’t think so, but it would make sense if he was a hormonal teenager when this happened.”

“Nothing says Sweet Sixteen by causing a Bronze Age conflict.”

“Just look over these for me.” Ranboo pushed the papers back into the folder. “Do the process of elimination thing.”

Tommy glared at him. “You’re giving me homework. This is like therapy all over again.”

“You either get reborn again or have to read through my Greek mythology ramblings. Pick one.”

“A tough choice.”

Ranboo sighed into his hand.

The school bell sounded and Tommy finished packing up the pieces of paper. “Fine, fine, I’ll do your homework. See you at lunch.”

He had maths now. But at least Tubbo was in his class.

He walked in and frowned at Miss Allingham, who stood at the head of the classroom. Ignoring all *that*, he sat down next to Tubbo and spread the Greek mythology folder back onto the table.

“What’s that?” Tubbo asked as he completed his drawing on the back of his calculator with a Tipp-Ex pen.

“Ranboo is making me do homework,” Tommy said, which technically wasn’t a lie.

Tubbo narrowed his eyes, doubtful. “You don’t even do official homework.”

“I’m a changed man.”

“Debatable.”

“Do you not accept change? Is this your Tory coming out story?”

“Never say those words to me again.”

Miss Allingham interrupted the class before he could repeat himself.

“So, I’m covering for your maths teacher today as she’s on maternity leave. But since it’s your last maths lesson before Easter break, I thought it would be nice for you guys to do something other than maths in this lesson.”

Now, Tommy was suspicious of her. Miss Allingham would *never* allow having fun in a lesson. He guessed it was more because the woman couldn’t do maths to save her life so this was her way of copping out on teaching integration.

“Can we watch a movie?” someone suggested.

“Sure, we’ll do a class poll.”

“Do you still hate Miss or is this easing your hatred for her?” Tubbo whispered as Miss wrote down movie titles on the board.

“Nope. I don’t like her, regardless if we use her Netflix account or not.”

“What about ‘Planes’?” another person called out.

Tommy thought nothing of the suggestion, even though it was the shit version of ‘Cars’ but Miss Allingham sure did with how her eyes practically bugged out of their sockets.

She immediately looked over at him with a face full of guilt. Tommy frowned at her.

“Why’s Miss looking at you like she killed your family or something?” Tubbo asked.

The realisation hit him. Phil had told her that his parents died in a plane crash during parent’s evening. He covered his mouth with his hands to stop himself from laughing.

She mouthed an apology to him. His face reddened.

“Let’s not watch that one,” she eventually said. “Tommy, what film do you want to watch?”

Tommy grinned and let go of his mouth. “Have you seen ‘Moana’?”

“Not this shit again,” Tubbo groaned and buried his face into his coat on the desk.

Tommy came out of school happy that they watched ‘Moana’. Techno sat in the front of the car with Niki and Wilbur in the back. Tommy opened the door and joined him in the front.

“Is Wilbur not walking home?” Tommy yelled as Wilbur kicked the back of his seat.

“I was tempted but he promised to do my chores for me.”

“Hi Niki by the way,” Tommy waved at her in the rear-view mirror. She waved back and smiled, to Wilbur’s dismay.

“Don’t say hi to him, he’s a prick,” Wilbur grumbled.

“I’m sorry that you interrupted my cry-fest last night by entering my room without my consent and got mad when I told you to leave,” Tommy snarked, honesty slipping into him. He was done with Wilbur’s shit.

“Thank you,” Wilbur said. “Wait you’re being sarcastic.”

“Stop the car so I can boot Wilbur out of it.”

“Wait until we’re at a roundabout,” Techno advised.

Wilbur huffed from the back. “You also yelled at Dad!”

“I sometimes lash out at people who care about me when I’m having an existential crisis and want to self-sabotage the good life I have,” Tommy spat with an edge in his voice. “Would you prefer an apology in writing or email, prick?”

“...oh.”

“We’re approaching a roundabout if you still want to boot Wilbur—”

“It’s fine, Techno,” Tommy said and rested his head against the window.

“So this is why Will was being a little whiny all day today?” Niki asked.

Techno nodded and turned up the radio. “Yep.”

When they got home, Tommy changed into casual clothes and entered the car again to set off on their journey for Techno's fencing tournament and just like the beginning of breakfast, it was the most awkward shit.

Wilbur was driving with Niki in the front whilst Tommy sat in the back with Techno and Phil. What made it awkward though was how Techno had his headphones in, blasting some music titled speed-running (Tommy didn't get the reference), leaving him to deal with Phil.

He *should* apologise to Phil. Like Wilbur said earlier, even if it was hypocritical, it was unnecessary of him to have shouted at him last night. But maybe isolating himself from these people would make his departure hurt less for them.

No, no he can't think like this. Not after today.

Ranboo made a whole fucking fact file stacked with Greek myths and tragedies. If he went through them all, there was a chance he'd figure out his myth. He shouldn't keep thinking like this, like all was lost. Sure, he had nine days left, less than two-hundred and sixteen hours. But he could do this. If not for himself, then for them.

He needed to stop with this shit, more for their sake than his.

He squirmed in his seat and leaned closer to Phil. "I'm sorry," he whispered.

Phil turned to face him. "Sorry, what was that?"

"I'm not saying it again."

"No genuinely, Tommy, I didn't hear what you said."

"Oh," his face flushed. "I said I'm sorry."

Phil's lips thinned into a line.

"I'm sorry too... for how I acted this morning," he said back. "I'm going to take Techno's advice with all this and give you time to explain yourself. I want to help you, Tommy, I really do. But I can't do that if you keep it all to yourself."

His heart both warmed and constricted.

"What if that's the only way I get through this?" he mumbled, timidly as he fiddled with his hands. "By keeping it to myself so it doesn't prolong the pain?"

Phil sighed, "You're too selfless for your own good."

Tommy froze. He had never been called selfless before. Only inconsiderate and self-centred.

"Am I still grounded?"

"You're not getting out of that one."

“Dammit,” Tommy whined, causing Phil to snort.

Tommy relaxed into his seat, relief flowing through him. Maybe his self-made problems with this family would be resolved by the end of today then.

As they arrived at the fencing studio, Tommy and Techno separated from the others to go into the changing rooms. Tommy prepared the protective gear for Techno as he got changed.

“You doing alright?” he asked as he zipped by Techno’s foil lamé jacket for him.

“Why wouldn’t I be?”

“You’re shaking.”

Techno shoved the gloves onto his hands. “You have no proof of that.”

“You’re trying to lie to an inaccurately labelled pathological liar.” Tommy rolled his eyes and placed Techno’s sabre into his hands. “You’ve got this, man.”

“Such encouraging words from a liar.”

Tommy laughed as he shook his head. “First of all, I said inaccurately labelled and second, you know what I mean.”

“Yeah, I do.” Techno gripped onto his sabre’s handle and breathed out evenly. “You’re right, I’ve got this.”

Tommy noticed his still hesitant tone. “No matter the number of matches you win or lose, you’re still the Blade.”

“Cringe.”

“I’m trying to be nice to you!” he exclaimed. “Alright, fuck you, if you lose your flawless streak in this tournament, I’m selling Steve.”

“Don’t touch my polar bear—”

“Then win.” He pushed Techno forward through the doors and into the tournament arena.

Eight other fencers sat on the waiting bench for the raised piste to be connected to the electrical devices attached to each fencer’s sabre and foil lamé jacket. It was a small tournament since Techno’s division was high and Snowchester wasn’t exactly the biggest town out there.

He patted Techno on the back and saluted before joining the others on the audience stands. He didn’t know where Niki got popcorn from but he still accepted her offerings of it (despite how it was toffee, the worst and inferior flavour, especially when salted existed).

“Is he nervous?” she asked him as she handed him another packet of popcorn.

“Fucking terrified,” he muttered back. “He hides it well.”

“He’s got this in the bag,” Niki assured and Tommy nodded. “Do you have any idea how fencing tournaments work?”

“Not a clue. The last time I attended one was in late 1700s France.”

“You did fencing?”

“It was either that or joining the French Revolution. I don’t follow people named after a type of ice cream.” Tommy didn’t expand on that, even with the confused look Niki gave him.

One of the referees began to write the order of matches onto the board. Even though each bout lasted at a maximum of nine minutes, seeing *that* many matches noted on the board made Tommy yawn on the spot. Technoblade’s name was littered across the board, so at least he had breaks in between. Each fencer went against each other once and if they won that match, they continued onto semi-finals, and then the finals.

Tommy went through at least four bags of popcorn before Techno’s first match—he was glad Niki only shared her snacks with him and not Wilbur because the prick would’ve eaten everything. Phil kept glaring at them whenever Niki hid her food after he asked if they could share any of it.

“Go on Technoblade!” he hollered as soon as Techno stepped up to his end of the raised piste, effectively embarrassing him. Niki giggled beside him and whooped as well. He bet Techno’s face was red under that mask.

The referee quietened the audience (meaning Tommy) and continued, “Pret, allez.”

Techno, being the tough piece of shit he was, chose the attacker position and promptly smacked the hell out of his opponent with the blade a second after the referee’s callout. It was honestly embarrassing for the guy. If Tommy didn’t enjoy watching people get humiliating by Techno, then he would’ve felt a *bit* bad for the lad.

It was one point to Techno, nil to the other, first to fifteen. Then, with more humiliating acts, the minute break was called, as Techno had eight points over his opponent, who only had two.

Techno rushed over to the audience stands, mask in hand. “Tommy, if you shout one more time when I win a point, I will throw for content.”

“If you lose your streak, you lose Steve,” he retorted.

Techno groaned loudly and returned to the piste.

A hand rested on his left shoulder. It was Wilbur. “I’m going to put our differences aside, you’re manipulating Techno with Steve so I forgive you.”

Tommy scowled at him and flicked his hand off his shoulder. “My apologies were sarcastic and you were the one being an arsehole to me first.”

“Fine, I’m sorry,” Wilbur said. Tommy rolled his eyes. “Okay, Jesus, I’m really sorry I made a big deal out of you snapping at me last night.”

“Thank you, now fuck off again. The round is about to start.”

Wilbur sighed and sat back in his seat. At least they were getting somewhere today—whether Tommy’s stubbornness contributed to the delay in this. He didn’t like apologies to begin with, but apologies in the middle of a fencing tournament just seemed... cheap. But it was Wilbur after all and the man practically bought everything off eBay.

Regardless, the match resumed and swiftly ended with Techno’s final hit slapping the opponent right in the middle of their mask. Techno won and continued *winning*. Without losing his streak, he qualified for the finals.

His last match, to determine his placement in the entire tournament, was against a fencer called Squid Kid. The show-down of names that shouldn’t be legally printed on a birth certificate. Apparently, the two were rivals and their rivalry had something to do with potatoes before fencing got involved (don’t ask Tommy what this meant, it was more Wilbur spewing random shit to him as the two fencers prepared themselves at the en-guard line). Either way, the two had history.

As the referee called in the round, Techno took the attacking position once again, having the right of way, though Squid parried all his attacks, still failing to proceed to a riposte, it was obvious it messed with Techno. He wasn’t used to people defending themselves head-on whilst he was in the attacking position—the other fencers at least backed away two steps.

Before he knew it, Squid defended with a circular parry, deflecting Techno’s blade and finally succeeded with his riposte, hitting Techno square in the jaw.

It may have been bad sportsmanship, but nothing could’ve stopped Tommy from booing the guy literally named after a useless sea animal. Well, besides the referee who glared at him until he shut up.

“I regret ever making a song about Squids now,” Wilbur said, bitter when Squid landed another hit on Techno, the score being two-to-nil in favour of Squid.

Tommy decided to disregard whatever *that* meant and stuffed his mouth with popcorn to stop himself from cussing out Squid again.

Techno corrected his stance as the referee counted them back in and attacked low outside, closer to Squid’s waist. He blocked Squid’s upcoming attack towards his side and lunged forward, his foot just centimetres behind the centre line and slashed his blade across the left arm, awarding himself a point.

This back-and-forth of each adding points to their scores continued between the two of them until Squid reached eight points and the minute break started.

Like before, Techno walked over to the audience stands, this time slower and dejected. Phil patted him on the shoulder reassuringly. Techno's face was red and sweaty, his hands were shaking.

"Fuck him up, Techno," Tommy said, glaring at Squid who was passively sipping on his water, unbothered by the tight scoreboard. "Go full-on The Art of War on his arse."

Techno's lips twitched. "The Art of War, you say?"

"Psychological warfare and all that unethical stuff. Mentally fuck with him. He knows you lead with the attacking position, psyche him out," Tommy advised.

"Good plan," he agreed, a little bit more life in his appearance.

"Mess him up for us, Tech," Wilbur added and the minute break ended. Tommy made sure to flip Squid off before the round began again.

"Did you just encourage Techno to follow an ancient Chinese military treatise for a fencing tournament?" Niki asked.

"It's an appropriate time for Sun Tzu."

When the round was counted in, Techno did what Tommy said and took the defence position, causing Squid to stagger on his feet for a moment, his confusion obvious. Though, his opponent quickly recovered and adopted an attacking position. Squid attacked high outside, with his sabre aimed between Techno's weapon and shoulder. Techno's blade slid along the opponent's, blocking the attack, and stepped backwards, almost inviting Squid to have another opening. He staggered on his feet again, though when he lunged, his back foot moved first.

The buzzer sounded, indicating a penalty for foot faults, awarding Techno a point.

Tommy cheered and discreetly flipped Squid off again (even though the twat wouldn't see it, it was the thought that counted—and as long as the referee didn't notice, it was a harmless action).

The match resumed and Techno switched up, taking the attacking position and pounced forward, his sabre attacking high inside until Squid retreated backwards. The quickness of Techno's movement interfered with his footwork again, causing Squid to fall off the raised piston. Another point was awarded to Techno. Eight-to-eight.

Techno continued to psyche out his opponent, changing between his attacking positions and taunting Squid to the point where his frustration created openings for Techno to exploit. Even though Techno still lost points to Squid with some of his defensive stance rounds, it *was* messing with him. His plan was succeeding.

Eventually, the score was fourteen-to-fourteen with a barrage needed, a fight-off to determine the tie.

For the final time, the referee called out, "Pret, allez."

Within seconds, Techno backed up, allowing Squid to take the attack, and re-engaged his opponent's blade by passing under it. He plunged forward, striking Squid straight in the jaw, the same place he first hit Techno during this match before his foot touched the ground.

The fencing studio erupted in noise. Techno didn't lose his streak, he fucking *won*. Phil clapped the loudest whilst Tommy hollered his praise with Niki repeating his phrases.

Wilbur whistled and shouted, "That's my brother!"

"I am not related to that man," Techno yelled back, a wide grin plastered on his face, as he accepted one of the medals.

"You're legally related to me, dickhead!"

Techno left that tournament with an unbroken streak, four medals hung around his neck and a trophy in his hands. And Tommy couldn't be any prouder.

In true British culture, the place of celebration for Techno was the local Wetherspoons (despite the fucker being American).

As Phil ordered drinks and food and everyone congratulated Techno, who absorbed all the praise and clout he could get, Wilbur harassed the music player with his queue of songs he wanted to play—Niki had to stop him from kicking the machine when it lagged after his twentieth request.

Phil brought over a tray of drinks, including one Coke for Tommy, and a single vodka and lemonade for Techno, who immediately refused it. "I'm not twenty-one. I can't drink that."

"Mate, you're not in America. The laws are different here."

"Just say you're a pussy who can't handle his alcohol," Tommy snarked, taking the paper straw out of his Coke.

"Like you can talk," Wilbur quipped back.

"Shut up that was one time—"

"And we will never let it go." And the three of them nodded whilst Niki sighed at them. At least she had his back.

Regardless, Techno tactically drunk his drink when the ice had diluted the vodka enough, which was like he said, pussy behaviour. When he finished his drink, Tommy listened to every single word that came out of Techno's mouth as he ranted about how dog-shit the other

opponents were. Techno then attempted to find information about Squid Kid by stalking his Facebook page—Phil had to take his phone away from him to stop the invasion of privacy.

Even though they were in a rowdy pub on a Monday evening, Tommy was enjoying himself. The songs he stole from Wilbur's radio were playing on the music player, Phil had allowed him to have a chocolate dessert despite the price being a bit too expensive, and Ranboo kept sending Tommy videos of Tubbo tripping over himself when failing to skateboard.

He couldn't help but look down at his tattoo; the bliss faded for a moment. Someone kicked his shin under the table and Niki shook her head.

"Have fun, Tommy," she said. "Don't think about that."

He nodded and pulled down his sleeve, hoping for the tattoo not to sting throughout the rest of the night. He didn't want a Dream visit to ruin this day for him.

"I need to talk to you about it soon," he said. He needed help with going through the fact files of Greek myths Ranboo had researched for him.

"You decide when. I'm here for whatever you need." She smiled at him and resumed her conversation with Phil.

As the night went on, Wilbur approached the bar for the fifth time in the last half an hour, ordering himself another drink. Tommy narrowed his eyes at the shot tray Wilbur had in front of him, which he didn't take back to the table; he remained sat at the bar, alone.

Techno shoved at his shoulder. "You alright with him drinking?"

Tommy bit on his cheek and continued to stare at Wilbur, who downed one of the shots.

"Yeah, I'm fine." He wasn't. "But is he?"

Wilbur glared down at the empty glasses on the tray.

"I think him being off with you earlier was more of a coverup," Techno suggested. "He's got something else going on."

Tommy sighed and turned to Techno, who still had his gold medals around his neck. "Sorry, this is supposed to be about you and I'm making you discuss Wilbur's declining mental health. You just won your fencing tournament. Enough with this sad shit."

Techno shrugged. "As much as I reject the family dynamic, we have to be there for him. Even when I *should* be celebrating my growing clout."

"Family dynamic?" Tommy repeated. "Am I a part of this family?" The tips of Techno's ears reddened.

"I hate this," he grumbled and ruffled his own hair so it covered his ears.

Tommy clapped his hand over Techno's shoulder. "Aww, Technoblade," he teased, prolonging his name.

Techno thumped his head on the table and kept his head resting on the wood.

Tommy caught Wilbur ordering more drinks out of the corner of his eye and shouted over the noise, "Wilbur! Come join me, I'm bullying the Blade."

Wilbur abandoned the bartender, a grin sprouted on his face and stumbled over to them.

"That's an idea I can get behind," he said, his words slightly slurred. Wilbur leaned into Tommy's side as he attempted to stand up straight. Sure, the smell of the Jägerbomb he just downed unnerved Tommy, but he put it aside for Wilbur's sake.

He poured a glass of water and forced it into Wilbur's hand. "Drink this and you can help me bother Techno."

"I can't believe you're solving alcoholism with bullying," Techno said, still resting on the table.

Wilbur laughed and Tommy lifted the glass to Wilbur's mouth. "You can only laugh at his pain if you drink this."

He laughed harder and does so, then leaned down onto Techno, pressing him more onto the table.

"Get him off me," Techno declared, trying to move Wilbur off his back.

Tommy took a picture of the two of them. "Nope."

"This is torture."

"No, this is family bonding."

"Those are synonyms." Techno bashed his head on the table again.

Techno shrugged Wilbur off him anyway and Wilbur returned to Tommy's side.

Wilbur stared at him, his eyes dazed and face slackened. The grin he had dimmed as he peered at Tommy, almost as if he were trying to see something that wasn't there.

"I need to tell you a secret," Wilbur whispered into his ear. It reminded him of New Year's Eve.

"Why is it that every time you get drunk, you feel the need to tell me something private about yourself?" Tommy joked, but Wilbur didn't share his amusement. A sombre look came across the other's face.

Wilbur leaned closer. "I think I'm beginning to understand why you're scared of me."

“What?”

“When I fall asleep, I no longer see that sad, blue ghost. I see someone else,” he paused. “I see what he does to you.”

Dread weighed him down into his seat. Tommy’s face paled, his skin chilled. As the words branded themselves onto his skull, he froze. He couldn’t open his mouth to speak or to stop Wilbur from talking. He couldn’t do anything but be helpless to what he didn’t ever want to hear.

Wilbur was talking about his brother, memories of his first life. Something he shouldn’t remember.

“When did you live in a ravine—?”

Techno tugged Wilbur away from Tommy. “Drink more water, Wilbur, and don’t tell Phil about all that or he’ll put you in for more therapy.”

“I’m not imagining things, Tech. This, this is *real*. I can feel it—”

“It’s just your dreams, Will.” The man opened his mouth to protest. “Drop it.”

Wilbur tried to shuffle closer to Tommy. He shuddered, his body reduced to a shaking mess. He wanted to leave, to get up and pretend like this never happened. To remain oblivious to the implications of Wilbur’s words and not have to grieve his brother *twice*.

“I promise you, I won’t...” Wilbur trailed off, the brown in his eyes resembling the honey that was once in his brother’s before the paranoia tainted it to black. “I won’t hurt you like he did, Toms.”

Tommy bit on his tongue until he tasted blood, not letting the whimpers come out.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he murmured, his legs shook underneath the table.

“Wilbur go back to Phil at the bar,” Techno ordered. Though, Wilbur stayed still. “Will, move before I make you.”

Tommy screwed his eyes shut for a moment, his fingernails piercing into his palms as he tried to distract himself from *this*.

Wilbur reluctantly walked off, but not before looking at Tommy again. Confusion, guilt and something else he couldn’t recognise flashed across his face.

Techno wiped Tommy’s face with his hand.

“Hey, no tears over him.” He didn’t even know he was crying. “Let’s get you sorted out.”

Techno dragged him by his arm, but he didn’t feel control over his legs, or anything for that matter. He was limp in Techno’s grip, his head spaced out to the point where he couldn’t even think.

They end up in the bathroom and Techno locked the door.

“I’m sorry,” he blurted out, his bottom lip trembling. “This- this was supposed to be your night and I fucking ruined it—” his breath hitched into a sob.

Techno put his arm around him and pulled Tommy to his chest. His head rested on top of Tommy’s, tucking the boy under his chin. He rubbed the younger’s back gently with his other hand as Tommy sobbed.

He muttered assurances and soft whispers as Tommy’s tears dampened his shirt.

“It’s okay,” he said, drawing patterns into Tommy’s back. “A bit cringe, but it’s going to be okay.”

Tommy choked out a laugh before crying harder.

“Ignore what Wilbur said. He doesn’t know what he’s talking about.”

Tommy soaked up his words, wishing for them to be true. He was scared, scared of what Wilbur was remembering. He didn’t want to lose another brother to insanity. He didn’t want to be hurt or abandoned again. Not for a second time.

“Sorry,” he hiccupped into Techno’s chest.

Techno dried Tommy’s face with his sleeve. “Don’t apologise. You have nothing to be sorry for.”

“I don’t know what I did to deserve this family.” Tommy hugged him tighter. “I really don’t.”

“I could say the same to you.” He brushed through Tommy’s curls. “Because of you, I can finally see the hype Wilbur caused over wanting a little brother.”

Tommy buried himself deeper into Techno’s side. His touch let him distance himself from the turmoil festering in his head.

“I’m sure you didn’t expect to deal with a crying child in a pub bathroom after winning your fencing tournament,” he mumbled into the fabric of Techno’s shirt.

Techno squeezed his shoulders. “I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

“Now *that* was cringe.”

“Oh, shut up,” he said, light-heartedly. “You better appreciate this hug because it’s the last one I’m ever giving you.”

“I’ll force another one out of you someday.”

“You probably will,” Techno admitted. Tommy smiled into him.

Chapter End Notes

Techno support <3

Chapter 22

Tommy didn't sleep last night. He had stayed awake all night, working on Ranboo's plastic folder of Greek myths, trying to get through all of them. His hope for finding one that just *fit*, that made sense, wilted every time he drew a red cross over another myth related to Zeus' escapades with various women. He didn't realise the full capacity and variety of myths and tragedies until now.

He focused solely onto those fact files because he knew that the second his mind wondered, it would be about Wilbur. He didn't want to cry again or be reminded of the man who both gave him a childhood and took away his youth.

It was complicated. It was even complicated before when he found out that Wilbur was reincarnated but didn't remember. But now with those memories returning, there was a chance his brother would come back.

No matter the drunken promises Wilbur whispered to him, that he'd never hurt Tommy like *he* did... it scared him. More than he wanted to admit.

As the light shined in his room, alerting Tommy that it was the morning, he packed up the plastic folder. He threw the sheets he deemed as irrelevant to him into his bedside draws. Maybe it was for the best that he didn't sleep. Dream couldn't visit him this way.

When he sat at the breakfast table, the fog in his head—the cloudiness that sheltered him from the parts of him that flinched and begged for Wilbur to stop reaching over the table, having his hands near him—grew. He liked it this way, not being coherent and fully *there*. It separated him from having to deal with these thoughts, the memories that the mere presence of Wilbur brought along, that were wrapped in barbed wire and smothering him.

He was fine. Completely in control and fine.

Tommy walked to school as Wilbur felt too hung-over to attend today, which he was thankful for.

The day ended fast. He didn't realise it was the second-to-last day before Easter Break until Ranboo told him when the two of them were in the library after school hours. Tommy continued his rummaging through the myth fact files with his notebook, separating the myths that didn't apply to him. So far, he had crossed off Circe, Cassandra, Pandora and Sisyphus.

He blinked down at the next sheet of paper he picked up, his heart beat faster.

The myth of Medusa laid in his hands. As he read it, flashes of that dreaded Dream visit flickered. Estella's cries rattled his ears, the library walls looked too similar to that apartment. His brother screamed out Medusa's name in that darkroom as he stabbed himself in the heart, knowing the myth was incorrect.

Those were memories Wilbur was going to remember. He took two-hundred and seventy lives that day. Wilbur had transparent blood on his hands that would seep red when the memories came back.

Would Wilbur still be Wilbur when he remembered? Or just like the ship of Theseus, would he be rewritten, replaced by the same man that kept Tommy up at night? He didn't want to know.

Someone touched his shoulder, too close to his neck. The pressure similar to that time Tommy was pinned to a ravine wall. Rough hands clasped around his neck, strangling him to the point where his begging died on his blue lips. His feet dangled helplessly, kicking at the man, his brother, who held him in place.

"Tommy, Tommy, it's me," a voice said.

He recognised it, but the squeaking of bats in that cave, the creaking of the stone walls, and his brother's cackling and ramblings drowned it out.

"Calm down, it's just me."

His eyes fluttered open, his eyelashes stuck together. The light of the room stung. He crumbled over, coughing, a breath lodged in his throat pierced his chest. He tried to ease his breathing as the weight around his neck released.

It was Ranboo calling his name, not his brother, not the soul stuck inside of Wilbur awaiting to be remembered.

He regained his breath as he calmed himself down, the soft phrases Ranboo muttered anchored him. Grey eyes drenched in concern and fear squinted at him.

"I'm- I'm fine," he croaked out, his hand still clutching at his chest.

"You don't have to lie to me, Tommy," Ranboo said, quietly.

"But I already am." He shook his head at him, the ringing in his ears amplified. Ranboo made a noise of confusion. "I haven't told you everything about my curse or with my brother—"

"You don't have to if you don't want to," Ranboo interrupted. "All I need to know is the bare minimum to help you."

"But—"

Ranboo's hand hovered over his, he glanced at him as if asking for permission. He nodded and Ranboo held it carefully, the warmth of Ranboo's clashing with the coldness of his own.

"I won't force you to explain yourself to me," his friend said. Ranboo squeezed his hand. "Ever."

"What if I want to?" he blurted out before he could stop himself.

Ranboo grabbed his other hand and held them both together. “Then you can, in your own time.”

With the fondness in Ranboo’s top part of his face, the comforting grip he had Tommy in and the honesty in his words, Tommy felt as if he could tell Ranboo anything at this moment.

He could let out the thoughts that had been pestering him ever since last night. He exhaled heavily, preparing himself.

“Wilbur is W. Soot but he doesn’t remember.”

Ranboo frowned, his eyes wide and confused.

“And he’s beginning to—” he cut himself off, he couldn’t stomach the next words. “He’s remembering.”

Tears swelled in his eyes, blurring his vision.

“He told me... he remembered hurting me in that fucking ravine.”

A whine left his throat. The fog in his head thinned, the cloudiness blew away.

His feet kicked at the ravine wall, trying to push his brother away from him, as his face turned blue. He hated that day. He just wanted to mess around for once, release some stress and behave like a kid again. He rearranged items in his brother’s chests, moved them into different places, and that annoyed him *so much*. Tommy didn’t know his brother would be *that* mad.

“I can’t do this.” He shook Ranboo’s hands off him. “I can’t—”

The ravine remained silent for once as Tommy, with the little oxygen he had, called out for his father to come to save him, to rescue him, full-well knowing that he was across the country doing fuck-all as his two sons sacrificed their lives for a losing war. But his screams didn’t stop his brother from shoving Tommy into a man-made cave and bordering it up, as a *punishment*. He punched at those walls for hours, until his fists painted the stone red, to no avail.

He could vaguely hear Ranboo calling out his name, but with every outside sound, he retracted further into himself. Ranboo mentioned something about Phil, but he didn’t care. He just needed his brother to let him out of this room, to make the walls stop caving in on him.

Yet, he couldn’t have that. Because his brother was dead. Though, the memories never felt more *real*.

Somehow, he had gotten into Phil's car and he was driving him somewhere. He knew he had something after school but couldn't recall what it was. The flashes of trees didn't help the numbness behind his eyes.

They parked in front of a familiar building. Ah, he had a therapy session. Fitting.

He sat on the chair this time, rather than the red bean bag Puffy had bought for him. He needed to sit on something stable rather than a chair he could sink into. He already felt moments away from passing out and a bean bag would aid to this.

Puffy kept addressing him in various ways, asking him questions, offering him snacks or drinks, telling him things about her day. He couldn't respond even if he wanted to.

But when Wilbur's name left her lips, his attention spiked.

"Did you end up sorting out that issue you had with Wilbur and that other man he reminded you of?"

He froze in his seat.

Why? Why the fuck did she have to bring that up? He couldn't do this today, he couldn't do this at all.

"Tommy?"

He didn't feel like the person sitting in his chair, but he was *there*. Breathing irregularly, keeping the bile from coming up his throat, and failing to keep the memories at bay.

The last moments Tommy had with his brother always confused him the most, before he was mercy-killed by his father, by Tantalus in that exposed hill.

After Schlatt's death, his brother handed his Presidency to Tobias. He heard Tobias' speech of wanting to create a solid future in L'Manberg, and his condemning of violence and wars, but *still* blew it to pieces.

His brother gave Tommy hope that his insanity and obsession with destroying the land he no longer yearned to reclaim faded from his eyes. But just like everything in Tommy's first life and the lives that followed, it was ripped from his hopeful hands and twisted into fuel for his nightmares.

Tommy doesn't answer Puffy's question. Or any of them.

An hour of one-sided silence allowed the festering in his head to ponder the inevitability of Wilbur remembering his past lives, his actions, his paranoia and hysteria. Tommy wanted to keep the man who loved the guitar and created stupid Spotify playlists, the foster-brother who ruffled his hair and flicked his forehead. He didn't want to see another man lose himself.

Puffy ended the session with a concerned sigh. Though, it fell flat to his ears. The explosions muffled it all.

The next day, Tommy felt a bit better. He still had moments where he couldn't catch up to himself, his thoughts providing too much, and whenever he could, he avoided Wilbur like the plague. But after yesterday, Phil forced him to be driven to school, not wanting Tommy to exert himself.

"I fucked up again, didn't I?" Wilbur asked on the car ride to school.

Tommy bit on his cheek and directed his eyes ahead. "Do you remember what you said to me?"

"No," he answered, distant. "The last thing I remember of that night was kicking the shit out of the music player before I started drinking Jägerbombs. But Techno filled me in and said I scared you or something."

Tommy clenched his fist into his palm, hoping for his nails to draw blood. "Yeah, yeah you did."

"I don't know what I said but—"

"How do you feel about ravines, Wilbur?" he asked, a hiss to his tone.

Wilbur spared him a look as he indicated left for the carpark.

"I don't particularly feel anything towards ravines," Wilbur said, yet he sounded uncertain.

"What about explosives?" Tommy insisted.

Wilbur parked the car and frowned at him, confused. "Tommy, what?"

"Revolutions?"

"Why are you asking me this?"

Tommy stared into his eyes and searched for another pair that haunted him as he slept. But he couldn't find it. A shade of sweet honey peered back, instead of a dark brown.

Wilbur opened his mouth but Tommy exited the car before he could speak.

"I'll see you after school," he said as he slammed the door shut. He breathed in the cold air and didn't know if Wilbur's answers lessened or worsened his fears. Either way, it left him unsettled.

His last lesson before Easter break was history. He walked in and greeted Tubbo with a fist bump and nodded at Ranboo. Although he felt like a mess, he needed to keep up his appearance—especially for Tubbo who he still hadn't told about his curse. He now had seven days to do that but it irked him to even think about it.

As soon as he saw the slip of paper placed on his desk with the lesson starter printed on it, he knew this lesson was going to be shit.

'In fifty words or less, explain whether President Tobias was right for exiling Timmy Soot.'

He glared down at the text and uncapped his pen, he wrote one word and left it there. Whilst Ranboo practically wrote an essay which was more than fifty words and Tubbo wrote two sentences.

Miss Allingham asked Tommy to collect everyone's starter slips and reluctantly, he got up to do so. He skim-read every single one, alarmed at how many agreed with the statement. He placed them on her desk and returned to his table, dreading what Miss was going to do with the answers.

"I thought as it is the last day, we'd start the lesson with a little debate."

Oh for fuck's sake.

"First, you talk with the people on your table as I go through your answers."

Tommy turned to the others and disregarded the look of sympathy on Ranboo's face (he wasn't wearing the face mask for once).

"Well, I said both yes and no," Tubbo said since neither Tommy nor Ranboo went to speak.

"Why yes?" Tommy asked with narrowed eyes.

"I mean, he *did* destroy one of King George's houses for no reason."

Anger pulsed through him. "I was grieving my—"

"Why're you talking in first person, boss man?" Tubbo asked, tilting his head. "Are you roleplaying L'Manberg? Can I be the one who exiles Timmy?" he joked.

Ranboo grimaced and Tommy glared at Tubbo. "That's not funny."

"You don't have to be embarrassed, I used to roleplay Southpark."

"Stop talking."

At least Tubbo's mention of his weird Southpark roleplay diluted Tommy's growing anger for a moment. But then Miss Allingham started the classroom discussion. He couldn't care less what these fuckers thought about his exile because it was none of their business. Here they were, debating whether exile was justified for traumatised fifteen-year-old, freshly mourning his brother. It was fucked.

“Now, Tommy, when I said, ‘fifty words or less’, I didn’t mean just one word,” Miss Allingham began, bringing the classes attention towards him. “Why did you just put ‘no’?”

Tommy’s lips thinned as anger fumed under his skin.

“Because he didn’t deserve it,” he said.

Miss Allingham quirked an eyebrow at him, intrigued. “Any arguments to add or is it only that?”

“His brother had just died, his best friend busied him with Presidency, leaving Timmy alone. Him destroying one of George’s properties was just a way for him to get his anger out, he didn’t mean to disturb the peace treaty.”

“So he is excused from the consequences of actions that provoked war just because he was grieving?” Miss Allingham said. Even the way she spoke irritated Tommy. It was almost as if to her, your closest family member violently dying in front of your eyes didn’t mean anything.

He stayed silent. He didn’t want to partake in *this*, in a discussion over whether the trauma and abuse he faced by the hands of Dream in exile was earned.

“Can anyone give me an argument defending Tobias?”

He screwed his eyes shut and Ranboo brushed his shoulder against him, keeping him from drifting away.

Someone raised their hand and answered, “Everyone uses the whole ‘Timmy was a child’ argument to his defence, but what about Tobias? He was only a couple of years older than Timmy and arguably, in a worse position.” Miss made a noise, encouraging the student to continue. “He was inexperienced for the role of President, practically forced into it by W. Soot, and all the other Presidents of L’Manberg were bad role models, with how they turned out to be alcoholic dictators and terrorists. He tried his best and exiling Timmy for threatening peace was the right thing to do.”

He opened his eyes and leaned closer into Ranboo. He hadn’t thought of it like that but still. He had the *right* to feel betrayed even if Tobias had reasons for exiling him because that was what happened, a betrayal.

“Nice answer,” Miss Allingham said. “Now, can you turn to pages sixty-seven to sixty-eight in preparation for the short exam question you’ll need to plan out?”

With his hands shaking, Tommy flickered through his textbook and stopped on the page. He frowned at it. He hadn’t seen these diary entries before.

He looked at the title and the cold seeped over him. It was Tobias’ diary entries. He had never read these before—he didn’t even know Tobias had a diary or that they were readable after all those years.

“You sure you’re alright in this class?” Ranboo asked.

“I can do this, I just need to read it and that’s it,” he whispered, more trying to convince himself than Ranboo. “It changes nothing, it’s fine.”

He grabbed his stress ball from his pocket and clutched it in his hand before he started to read the text.

Schlatt called me a traitor once. Right before he sent a firework straight into my face.

Maybe he was right about that all along. [Timmy’s] dead and I betrayed him.

Every day I see those fucking fireworks, the sparks, the burns, everything. But somehow, the glassy eyes of the boy I wronged is the thing that doesn’t let me sleep.

I shouldn’t have listened to George’s ultimatum.

No, I did what I had to do. He threatened our peace period and if exiling a citizen, who provoked conflict, was the way to settle this, then I made the right call.

He wasn’t supposed to die there. He was supposed to come back.

I miss him.

Tommy stared down at the page, shocked. He expected Tobias to blame him, to maintain the objectivity of a President and hatred for the person who ruined the peace between New L'Manberg and the Essempi Kingdom. But that wasn't it.

Tobias *regretted* it. He didn't brush off his exile like Dream did. He was *sorry*.

The person he believed didn't care when he died seemed to care the most.

But this betrayal wasn't just one-sided. Even though he hated to admit it, Tommy had fucked up too. He endangered and almost compromised the peace deal between New L'Manberg and the Essempi Kingdom. He undermined his best friend's Presidency and embarrassed the nation he slowly began to lose love for.

Tommy may have died without an apology, yet he also died without taking the blame off Tobias.

Minutes went by as Tommy continued to reread the passage. He struggled to stop himself from imagining Tobias, alone after the wars, after all those originally in the Revolution had died, leaving him alive in a deserted and loveless country. He thought that no one could've ever understood how *lonely* Tommy felt during exile, but maybe that didn't apply to Tobias.

He rubbed at his eyes and sighed. He didn't expect a single history lesson to reconstrue the mentality he had throughout the years since his first death. Admittedly, he believed Tobias to be right with his insults of calling Tommy selfish sometimes, because it had never passed his mind to think of the other perspective, from *his* side. But now it was too late.

"You should all be finished planning that question now," Miss Allingham interrupted. "Now, another question I want to tackle before Easter break is a small one that won't come up on your GCSE papers, but can be used in other questions. The debate over whether Dream was a real person or a hallucination in Timmy's exile."

His face paled. His breathing hastened. No, no this is where he drew the line. The sickness in his stomach, the nauseating disdain he had growing inside of him imploded.

Ranboo stood up from beside him. "Miss, I need to go to medical."

"Sit back down Ranboo, the lesson is almost over."

"Unless you want me to projectile vomit all over your classroom, then let me go to medical," Ranboo persisted.

"Fine." Ranboo grabbed Tommy's arm and pulled him up with him. Tommy frowned, his heart still beating too quickly for him to think straight. Tubbo went to join them. "Only one other person can go with you to medical."

Tubbo sat back down and shared a look with Ranboo before Tommy was pushed out of the room.

The bathroom door slammed open and Tommy rushed over to one of the stalls. He gagged into the toilet seat bowl until the taste of iron left his mouth. Ranboo rubbed his back. He rested his head on the bathroom stall wall.

“I am so fucking pathetic,” he sniffed, his breathing uneven. The feeling of déjà vu hit him. He was in the same position he was six months ago, having a breakdown in the school toilets because of a history lesson. “I’ll never get over what happened in my first life, will I?”

Ranboo sat beside him with a face full of worry and care.

“You are one of the strongest people I have ever met, Tommy,” he consoled earnestly.

Tommy scoffed and wiped his mouth. “Who’s the strongest?”

“Tubbo decked me once,” he said and Tommy snorted.

“How’d he reach you?”

“He had a ladder.”

Tommy let himself laugh, despite the pitiful situation and heaviness in his head.

“So I cause a public disturbance in the class to see if you’re okay and it turns out you’re talking shit about me?” Tubbo bellowed, bursting into the bathroom.

“How’d you hear us?” Ranboo asked, grinning at him as Tubbo stood at the door of the toilet stall.

“The walls are thin and my patience for you is thinner,” Tubbo threatened, his eyes slit.

“Ranboo, you better start running, my guy,” Tommy added.

“I’m sure Tubbo won’t cause harm to me right now,” Ranboo said confidently. Tubbo gave him a look. “Okay, he might, but I’m not moving.”

“I’ll wait until after school.”

“I appreciate it,” Ranboo said, sarcastically.

“You feeling less sick, boss man?” Tubbo asked.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m fine now,” Ranboo narrowed his eyes at him, almost as if he could sense the lie. It wasn’t technically a lie though, since he didn’t feel the need to throw up anymore, but mentally, he was still a bit fucked.

“Bullshit but I’ll let it slide,” Tubbo conceded.

The bell sounded, signalling that school had ended.

“You want to come round mine?” Tubbo asked as he grabbed his phone from his pocket.

Tommy shook his head. “No, I have something I need to do tonight.”

“Alright, I’m gonna go home now, I’ll see you guys later in the week.”

Tommy and Ranboo said their goodbyes and watched him leave. Ranboo stayed by his side.

“I’m thinking of visiting Tobias’ statue later,” Tommy mumbled. “For... closure or something.”

Ranboo nodded at the idea. “Leave flowers for him.”

“What? You like flowers, Ranboo?”

“Don’t make fun of me whilst you have a flower on your arm.” He pointed at Tommy’s temporary tattoo. “And for your information, alliums are my favourite flower.”

“What do they look like?”

Ranboo pulled up a photo.

Tommy scowled at the purple flower. “They look nice but they have a stupid name.”

“You are so insensitive.”

He chuckled and accepted Ranboo’s hand to get up from the floor.

“Do you want me to go with you?” Ranboo asked.

Tommy paused for a moment and stared down at the Zagreus tattoo on his wrist. “No, I have someone else in mind.”

He waited with the black sky in the park for Niki to show up.

There was still a dent in the body of Tobias’ statue from when he kicked and punched at it all those months ago.

He didn’t recognise the statue in front of him as his childhood best friend. Partly because the statue was an older version of Tobias with one eye missing. The facial features were inaccurate, but the scars on his face weren’t.

Tommy bit on his lip. It was partly his fault why those scars existed. He didn’t interfere when fireworks shot Tobias when he was caged in by his own decorations. Tommy stayed on the

sidelines with his brother, screaming out in shock. But he did nothing about it. He didn't help his friend.

As he picked flowers from the gardens, Niki joined him. She greeted him with a small hug and a sad smile.

He stood facing Tobias with flowers in his hands and Niki by his side. She stared at the statue with the same look in her eye, bitterness coated in acceptance. Tommy knew Niki died in the Final L'Manberg War, the one Tobias led. Despite her history with Tobias, she agreed to be here with Tommy, comforting *him* instead.

"I forgive you," he said to her, breaking his gaze from Tobias' bronze face to look at her. "And I hope you forgive me too, Calypso."

Her eyes watered. Tommy couldn't deny that he was one of the men who abandoned her, just like her first myth predicted.

"I forgave you years ago, Tommy," she said softly, looping their arms together. "We've both wronged each other, but not in this life."

Tommy nodded and pulled her closer. He stared back at his childhood friend.

"Do you miss him?" he whispered into the cold night.

"No," Niki said shortly, surprising him. "He was cursed as well, I don't know if I already told you."

His body stilled. It confused him. He, his brother, his father, Niki and now Tobias were cursed. All these people were involved in his first life and the L'Manberg Wars in some way or another against the Essempi Kingdom. It couldn't be a coincidence.

"He only showed up once in my void, then he was reborn and didn't come back," she continued. "He's always been smart, so he probably figured out his myth on the first try."

He put his arm around Niki's shoulder.

"I miss him," he murmured, his voice soaked in sorrow. Niki hugged his side. "I miss him so fucking much."

"He missed you too." Niki rested her head on his shoulder. "Y'know how your item that survived each rebirth was that notebook and mine was the necklace?" He nodded. "Tobias' was that scarf you gave him. He had it in the void."

Tommy sniffed as his cheeks flushed a deep red. "Of course it fucking was."

Niki hummed, amused. "Is there a reason you wanted to come to visit his statue today?"

"A history lesson made me realise some things," he eventually said. "He cared so much for L'Manberg, even more when I gave up on it. He wanted something permanent and stable... and I was in the way of him achieving that."

Niki stayed quiet as his thoughts muddled together.

“It still doesn’t excuse how the prick didn’t visit me in exile,” he chuckled dryly, something pinched at his heart. “Out of everyone left alive, him visiting would’ve meant the most.”

A tear slipped down his face.

“If you could say something to him and he’d hear, what would you say?” Niki asked.

“That I didn’t deserve to be exiled,” he said, his eyes focused on Tobias’ scars and emotionless face. “But he didn’t deserve to be alone either.”

The two remained in silence, the cold winds swaying their bodies as they stood staring at the statue that meant more to Tommy than it ever did before. Tommy gently placed the flowers at the foot of Tobias’ statue, hoping that whatever afterlife Dream permitted for him was merciful.

Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy didn't know where he was or how he got here.

He woke up in some sort of temple or palace that was older than Philza Minecraft himself. Ancient alabaster carvings of men in fustanella skirts and carrying pottery surrounded him on the sandstone walls. Yellow pillars held up the red sculptured archways. His neck hurt to see the roof with how high up it went. Inklings of gold patterns plastered the ceiling, mixed with limestone. The room he was in looked like some sort of ballroom.

He stepped forward and the movement echoed throughout the construction. He looked down, confused at how his bare feet made such a sound, and the pattern on the floor confused him even more. He had seen that somewhere before. The ten blue circles with white diamonds, the four black circles and rectangular details coated in gold. The realisation struck him as he noticed the bricked layout between the two different coloured circles.

It was the Knossos Board. That stupid game Dream kept forcing him to play. Below his feet was the River Styx, the boundary that separated the world of the living from the world of the dead. A shudder violated his spine.

Where the fuck was he?

The Knossos Board pattern pointed in the direction towards the gated doors on the other side of the ballroom. He moved closer and leaned down, peering through the gap. Tall brick walls with vines growing along them stood in that locked room. He frowned and pushed forward but a voice stopped him from opening it.

“Stay away from that door, Tommy.”

He twisted around and Dream sat on a table that wasn't there before. He looked between the now unlocked door and the God.

“I mean it, Tommy,” Dream reinforced. “It's dangerous in there.”

He spared another glance at the brick walls, the sight bugging him—there was a sense of familiarity but he couldn't place it.

Dream's chair scratched against the floor and Tommy rolled his eyes at his dramatics as he sat down opposite him.

His mask had more blood stained onto it than the last visit; there was a spec of gold in there as well. It was ichor, the blood of the Gods.

Dream perceived his gaze and wiped the golden marks off it with his cloak. There was a book on the table with the title Catullus sixty-four, the rest was written in Ancient Greek.

Silence filled the empty ballroom. Tommy's legs bounced against the floor, preparing himself for what this visit meant. Yet, Dream didn't say a word.

"Why is Wilbur beginning to remember?" he asked, wanting this shit-fest to at least be useful.

Dream leaned forward, his shoulders hunched, almost protectively. "That's- that's not possible."

"Oh?" he tilted his head in mocked disbelief. "Well, apparently it fucking is."

"No, Tommy." Dream shook his head. "That's not supposed to happen."

He glared at the God, the urgency and denial in his tone bothered him. He wasn't used to Dream displaying such vulnerability. He had only heard this from him once, during exile, when the conditioned response Dream had ingrained in him slipped for a moment.

His eyes darkened. "Is this just another reason why this life is so *exciting* for you? Let's watch Tommy get attached to another person he looks to as an older brother and rip it away from him!" he shouted, vexation on his tongue. "Let's make the person he's grown to love remember the man who ruined it for him."

"Tommy, believe me, that's not—"

"I can't believe you! Not after everything you've done to me. How hard is it for you to understand that?" he pushed against the table, the chair propelling backwards. He hated how centuries had passed in this void, years of him screaming for answers until he collapsed onto the floor and woke up with tears in his eyes. And now was the time Dream finally gave him answers. But he couldn't trust it, he couldn't trust *him*. Not after everything Dream had done for him.

"Let me speak!" Dream sneered with spite.

He flinched, a sickness settled in his stomach.

"I'm doing all of this for you—" a quiet gasp left Dream's lips, his gaze locked onto something over Tommy's shoulder.

He turned around. A tall, robed figure in a veiled bonnet hovered in the corner of the ballroom. Black eyes peered at him and a warning hum resonated in the room. The figure vanished, taking the shadows with it.

His pulse throbbed against his neck. He shuddered and looked back at Dream.

The God was shaking.

"Who was that?" he demanded, his voice wavered from the disturbance. "...Dream?"

An iron grip grasped around Tommy's wrist. Dream's skin brushed across his tattoo. His touch felt oddly human.

“Figure it out. Please,” Dream begged with gritted teeth. His grip hardened. “I can’t break any more of my rules for you.”

Tommy concealed a wince. “You’ve already broken your rules?”

“After Sisyphus, I had a change in heart,” Dream confessed, trembling.

“So it took you witnessing my own mother overdosing in my arms for you to finally work out that this whole curse thing is a *bit* fucked up?” he fumed, not caring about the quivering in Dream’s shoulders or shortness of his breath.

Dream dipped his head in shame. He let go of Tommy’s wrist, leaving a redness behind.

“You’re supposed to argue back,” Tommy said, confused.

“You are not the only one running out of time,” he whispered.

At the mention of time, a lodge crawled up his throat. Tommy coughed into his hand to clear his throat, yet it didn’t ease the blockage. He coughed again, trying to clear his airway.

“Tommy?” Dream said, stepping closer.

He began to choke. He couldn’t breathe.

“Tommy!”

Gold blood spat into his hand. He dropped to the floor, clawing at his throat until his vision blurred.

Tommy woke up gasping. His hands were coated in red blood. He gagged until he could breathe again. His head throbbed, a dull ache spiked at the back of his neck with every new breath.

There were hand-shaped bruises around his right wrist. Dream.

His heart hammered against his chest, it was happening again. The date on his phone confirmed his worries.

It was the fifth of April.

In each life, whenever he reached minimal days before he ran out of time to figure out his myth, his body prepared itself to die. The sickness could last as long as it wanted—with how it once meant Tommy had one last day of coherence to guess his myth before death. During this period, the veil between Dream visits and reality faded. If he got hurt in his dreams, it transferred to real life.

With his teeth chattering, he struggled to get out of the bed. He *needed* to move. He needed to clean up this blood before someone walked in and took him to a hospital. If he stepped into a

hospital, he knew he would die in one.

He squinted at the light in his room as he forced his legs to move. He couldn't feel the wall as he clutched it to get to the bathroom.

The water both burned and iced his skin as he washed the blood off him; sweat dampened his forehead. Nausea followed him as he returned to his bed. A wave of dizziness flooded through him.

"Tommy! Get your arse up, the bins need emptying!" He brushed his shoulders over his ears to muffle the sound. He curled beneath his covers but the heat was too much.

"Tom!"

He attempted to blink the black blotches and stars out of his vision but a weight pressed against his eyelids. He couldn't keep his eyes open. A pitiful whine left his lips.

The door creaked and someone walked in.

"It's like ten o'clock and you're still in bed?"

It was Phil.

An unbearable brightness invaded the room as Phil pushed the curtains apart. Tommy groaned and tears brimmed in his eyes. It was too much.

He just wanted to be swept up into someone's arms and held, to press his head against their chest and block the light.

"Tommy, you okay?" Phil asked, his voice closer than before.

"M' head hurts," he slurred, eyes screwed shut in comfort.

A cold hand touched his forehead and he chased after it. It eased the pain in his head for a moment. He whined again as the touch departed.

"You're burning up," Phil muttered before he rushed out of the room.

His body felt fuzzy, he couldn't follow a single train of thought passing through him. He wanted Phil to come back, or Techno and Wilbur. He didn't want to be alone.

His eyes slipped shut as shivers rattled his back. He fucking hated this curse.

Time passed and hands pushed away his covers. Phil was back with the medical basket.

"Tommy, I need you to sit up for a moment, okay?" he said as he gently lifted Tommy's pillows so his back was still resting against something comfortable.

A tube thing was placed into his mouth, he couldn't remember the name of it. His head was too floaty. The room span and Tommy tried to hide back under his covers, but Phil wouldn't

let him.

“Dad, stop,” he grumbled, the tube dropping from his lips.

Phil froze, his breath hitched. Tommy didn’t know why but he didn’t want the tube back in his mouth. It was too glassy.

“Just let me take your temperature and you can go back to sleep,” Phil said softly. There was something sweet to his voice that wasn’t there before.

Phil’s hand rubbed circular motions into Tommy’s shoulder as he put the tube back into his mouth. He leaned into his touch, tolerating the sensation in his mouth. Phil kept his hand there when the tube was taken out.

“Can I sleep now?” he mumbled, his mouth dry and mushy.

Phil squeezed his shoulder and nodded.

Wilbur sighed as he drove home from Niki's house. They were in the middle of recording the backing vocals for one of his A-level pieces when Phil had called him. His dad practically begged for him to come home and help him with whatever was happening with Tommy. From the way he sounded, it was almost as if Tommy was dying but knowing how his dad overreacted with this stuff, he just had a migraine or something.

He didn’t get why he was needed to be in the house for this. Sure, for his dad’s sake but for Tommy? The kid had been avoiding Wilbur for the past week, even more than that before. The reasonings for Tommy’s behaviour confused him—first it was because of a nightmare, then the whole bullshit of Tommy telling him that ‘you didn’t do anything, *he* did’ (who the fuck was ‘he’?), and now it was something to do with what he said to Tommy when he was drunk.

It didn’t help that his own nightmares had been fucking with him. He didn’t remember any of them, but they always ended with the blue, ghost showing up, though the ghost cried more than usual. During his childhood, the ghost used to pull him out of those nightmares, guide him from the explosions and button-infested rooms he never understood and buried him in blankets of blue. But, ever since Tommy came along, the ghost didn’t interfere anymore. He endured those nightmares, the screams that sounded too *real*, and woke up thrashing against his covers.

He didn’t understand and he wasn’t sure he even *wanted* to.

Wilbur turned off his radio and exited the car, preparing to be ignored by Tommy. He walked up the stairs and put his guitar back into his room before going to Tommy’s.

He expected to see the fucker making a big deal over a simple migraine. But his stomach dropped as he entered the room.

The boy laying on the bed looked dead. He was sickly pale with his cheeks flushed a bright red, his brows were furrowed in pain.

“Dad? What’s wrong with him?” he asked quietly.

Techno stood by the bedside table as he crushed paracetamols into a glass of water, probably since Tommy couldn’t swallow tablets whole.

“I… I don’t know,” Phil said back, his hand pinching at the bridge of his nose. “He keeps slipping in and out of it, and when he’s awake, he doesn’t make any sense.”

Wilbur left to retrieve a flannel. He wet it in the bathroom and tenderly placed it across Tommy’s forehead. He was tempted to sit down on the bed next to him and hold him, hoping that would be enough to take his pain away.

Tommy hummed under his breath, almost in relief. Wilbur fixed his pillows and his eyes blinked open. They were squinted in discomfort, despite how the room was as dark as it could be. He groaned weakly and nestled his face against his covers. The flannel fell over his eyes. Tommy let out a noise of distress.

“Hey, it’s just me, it’s just Wilbur,” he whispered as he moved the flannel.

Tommy’s forehead creased. “Wilby?”

He choked on his breath.

Techno stifled his laughter from behind him and it took everything in Wilbur to not beat the shit out of him.

His heart could’ve burst at this moment and he wouldn’t even be mad about it. His cheeks hurt from how wide he smiled down at the boy. He knelt closer to him.

“Yeah, I’m here, Tommy,” he said.

Techno joined his side. “If you try to twist my name into some cringe nickname, I’m going to the store and never coming back.”

Tommy stared at him and lifted his hands, reaching for him. “Dickhead.”

Techno rolled his eyes at his *nickname*. “I’ll take that one,” he said as he let Tommy grab onto his arm and pull him closer to the bed. He picked at the sleeve of Techno’s jumper, rubbing the soft material.

“This is humiliating.”

“Then why are you smiling?” Wilbur asked with a grin.

The tips of Techno's ears reddened. "That's how I show embarrassment."

"Just admit you're attached to the gremlin."

"Well, he's more attached to me." He attempted to tug Tommy off his arm, but the boy gripped harder.

A clicking sound came from their left. Phil had his phone in his hand, the lens focused on the three of them.

"Delete that right now," Techno demanded, still fighting against Tommy's grip.

In Wilbur's opinion though, the man wasn't even trying to get Tommy off him, since currently, Tommy couldn't even open his eyes without crying a little bit because of the brightness in a dull room.

"It's now my home-screen wallpaper," Phil said, laughing at the murderous look Techno threw his way.

A day had passed and Tommy was still sick. Wilbur suspected he had some type of fever or bacterial infection he probably got from the London Underground last week (that was a reach but the London Underground was a cesspit of diseases).

Thankfully, Tommy stopped being a little pussy and could swallow the medication now, but he was still delirious half the time. It was obvious when the boy wasn't completely lucid since he let Wilbur settle down next to him without him freaking out and calling him a murderer. It stung Wilbur a bit that Tommy had to be *this* sick for him to not be scared of him.

It was late in the night and Wilbur sat at the end of Tommy's bed. He was asleep, the pain still evident on his face as he grimaced every once and a while. But it was peaceful.

He reached his hand over and a flicker of something disrupted his vision before he could touch Tommy. The dark cave was back. He was in someone else's body, hands pushed down on a small, blonde boy's shoulders. He could feel the boy shaking underneath his grip.

"I know, I see it in your eyes, I see it," the man inside of Wilbur's body taunted, sadistic laughter echoing his words. "I can hear it in your voice... Tommy, you're scared."

Wilbur jerked backwards, his hand retreating to his side. His shoulders shook as he rubbed his eyes, wishing for the dust to dissolve and the voice to leave his mind. His head ached, confusion muddling the images he just saw.

He didn't know what the fuck he was seeing, what he was hearing, why *Tommy* was there. He didn't understand any of it.

With a permanent tremor in his hands, he ran out of the room and into the garden. He pushed open the shed door and crumbled into his chair, close to tears. He was so fucking *frustrated*.

Caught in a commotion of wanting answers and knowing he wouldn't like what they were.

Wilbur picked up his notebook and wrote inside of it:

I hurt Tommy?

Was 'I' the correct pronoun? Was it him or someone else? The man had scars over his hands, mud and grime under his fingernails. Those weren't his hands, but it felt like *his* body, *his* memories. Memories he didn't experience at the moment but somehow had gained.

He gripped his hair harshly. He was fucking losing it, hearing things that weren't real. Sighing, he released his grip.

Bile tasted in his mouth and he crossed out the writing on the page until the tip of his pen burned the paper.

His lips thinned and he stared at the packet on the table beside him. Even as he glared at it, he couldn't stop himself from digging inside and grabbing the lighter next to it. He lit the rolled joint and brought it to his lips, yearning for the flickering in his head to disappear.

As he rested his head against the chair, he focused on his red LED lights that hung from the ceiling. He blinked and his eyes felt heavy.

The red on the ceiling bled downwards. Flesh and strings of cut-up intestines painted the walls. Barbed wire, shattered glass and flood tainted the floor. Eyelids squelched open on the ground. The shadows whispered *things* at him, phrases and abuse he never wanted to hear.

"Zagreus let me out! I'm not supposed to be down here—" echoed throughout this place. It was the same voice he heard earlier. The one who hurt Tommy.

He breathed in and poison filled his lungs, shards of glass infested his insides, piercing the skin of his throat and walls of his rib cage.

To his left was a river. The pool of a miserable azure seemed inviting, screaming words his head had told him for years ever since his mother died, that it was *his* fault, that she was right and he would be his own demise.

He struggled to breathe and wasn't sure it was worth it.

He wanted to dip his feet into that river. Hoping that *something* dragged him to the bottom, drowning him in the voices of his illness. But he couldn't. He couldn't even move.

Chains and shackles garnished his wrists and ankles. He was imprisoned. Trapped in the cycle of desiring death and freedom as the fatal air he breathed killed him slowly.

Another voice screamed, though it wasn't drenched in malice nor soaked in deceit. It was kind, desperate almost. Something shook his shoulders, the touch burned him, scorching the layers of his exposed flesh until white bone appeared.

"Wilbur!"

His eyes wrenched open. He expected to see that ghost, with his carefree laughter and blue stained tears. But instead, it was a man with pink hair, gold and emerald earrings, and a face immersed in concern. Technoblade.

“Follow my breathing.”

Desperate, he tried to listen to Techno’s words as if they were engraved in his skull, but the voices from the river submerged him. Techno’s hands tugged him closer, the touch not hurting him this time. He wanted to forget that fucking place, the gore of the walls, the dark brown eyes on the bloody floor.

He shivered as Techno draped his coat around him, securing it around his shoulders like a safety blanket.

“You good now?” Techno asked as he reached over to put out the lit joint Wilbur didn’t even remember leaving there.

“I’m going to sound crazy,” he murmured, his voice rough. “But I keep seeing things... and I can’t stop it.”

Techno’s face furrowed. He grabbed Wilbur’s arm, almost as if he expected to see something on the inner skin. He let go, frowning. “What do you see?”

“Hell.”

“Hell?” Techno repeated, more worried than sceptical.

“I don’t know how else to describe it,” Wilbur said, relying on the last threads of his sanity to keep the *red* from returning. “And I keep seeing Tommy. But not *our* Tommy.”

“Wilbur...”

“I know! I know I sound like a fucking weirdo but I don’t—” he pulled at his hair until Techno returned his hands down to his lap. “I don’t know what’s going on.”

“Are you still flushing your meds?”

Wilbur just wanted to fucking *cry*. He would’ve thought that out of everyone, Techno would’ve understood and not reduced all of this shit-fest to his prescribed medication. It was more than just his declining mental health, it was something worse, something else.

“That has nothing to do with this,” he rejected.

Techno repeated his question, sterner.

“Yes,” he finally answered, his body ached in defeat. “Yes, I am.”

“Is it not a coincidence that you begin to see this stuff whilst unmedicated?”

“That’s the thing, Techno! I don’t know if it’s recent,” he shouted. The anger, resentment, fucking *everything* that had built up imploded. His blood pumping rang his ears. “I’ve always seen shit, the same ghost when I dream. But never this! Never these glimpses of Tommy scared of me or whatever that hell-hole was.”

“You’re not crazy, Wilbur,” Techno assured, though the uncertainty in his eyes betrayed his tone. “There has to be a reason for this. Whether that means it *is* your mental health or something Tommy is involved in, I’ll help you figure it out.”

He didn’t expect *that*. But Techno did always cling onto the fact that he was slightly older than him, taking on the big-brother role every once and a while and acting like the middle-child when needed be.

He stared at Techno. The man who helped him through his destructive episodes after his mother’s death, picked him up whilst blackout drunk from the shadiest areas, and was there for him despite denying their brotherly relationship whenever Wilbur brought it up.

He wasn’t alone with this anymore.

“Now, I came in here to make you check on Tommy since Phil is tearing up the kitchen looking for those migraine tablets and I don’t feel like having a sickly child cling to me again,” Techno said. “But, if you’re still, y’know, bothered by whatever just happened, I can go instead of you.”

His heart warmed, not used to Techno being *this* considerate all in one sitting.

“It’s fine, I can visit the little gremlin.”

He just hoped another memory didn’t appear.

When he could stomach the sight of the red lights on the ceiling again without it bothering him, Wilbur made his way back inside and into Tommy’s room, who was still asleep.

He hovered his hand over Tommy, his hand trembling. He brushed off the hair stuck to Tommy’s forehead, relieved when nothing flashed before his eyes.

Tommy stirred into a state of broken consciousness. Wilbur combed his fingers through his blonde hair, gently detangling the knots. The boy hummed in content and his eyes fluttered. There was still a dazed shade in the blue.

Tommy nuzzled closer to him, clinging onto a clump of Wilbur’s sweatshirt. Though, a second later he released it.

Wilbur frowned. “You alright?”

He shook his head and winced. “You were smoking again.”

Shame poured into him. He forgot to change his clothes before leaving the shed. “Oh, sorry about that.”

“I thought you stopped,” Tommy huffed, his words still slurred yet his irritation stood out.

He smiled sadly down at him and resumed brushing out his hair. “It’s not that simple, Toms.”

“Then make it simple.”

If it were *simple*, the mere look in Tommy’s eyes and desperation in his face would’ve made dropping his main coping mechanism worth it. The tremors in his hands and ignoring the crippling desire to make himself forget... all of it would be worth it for Tommy’s sake. But he couldn’t. Not yet.

He sighed and retrieved the damp flannel that had fallen onto Tommy’s pillow. He placed it back on the boy’s forehead and tucked Henry back under Tommy’s arms.

“Only you would get sick during school break,” Wilbur joked, attempting to lighten the mood.

“Where’s Da- Phil?” Tommy’s pale face reddened.

Wilbur couldn’t stop the smile from reaching his face at Tommy almost calling Phil ‘Dad’. It replenished him with something addictive, it was more than warmth or blooming in his chest.

“Dad’s currently ransacking the kitchen for more stuff to drug you up with,” he said.

“Why’d you word it like that?” Tommy asked as he rubbed his nose. It was obvious he was fighting sleep with the way he kept blinking. “Makes him sound like a wrong’un.”

Wilbur ruffled his hair. “Sleep. I know you’re tired.”

“No, I’m not,” he yawned. Wilbur’s smile widened.

“Would you sleep if I played you a song?”

He knew Tommy would fall asleep the moment Wilbur left him alone, but the selfish part of him wanted to exploit this, to make the most of how *this* Tommy wasn’t looking at him with disgust and fear. He wanted a moment of normalcy, back to when Tommy let him play him songs on the guitar and fell asleep at ease.

Tommy nodded and Wilbur quickly fetched his guitar. He sat on the edge of his bed. “What song?”

“The one about soft boys and those weird hoodies you wouldn’t let me Google.”

Wilbur grinned and began to play 'Soft Boy'. Even though by the chorus Tommy was asleep, he still finished the song. With the last strum of the guitar chord, Phil walked in with a box of paracetamols in his hands.

“You really are a panic parent,” Wilbur said, laughing at the offended look on Phil’s face.

“I’ve never had to deal with a fever this bad, stop giving me shit.”

“He’s asleep now anyway and he seems better.” Wilbur rested his guitar against the bed. “He wasn’t calling me a murderer to my face, so he’s still kinda out of it.”

Phil moved Tommy’s covers so he wouldn’t overheat. “Give him time, Will. He’s just going through... something.”

Wilbur was already less patient than those around him, but with *this* on top of it, he was one harsh tug away from snapping. It scared him.

“He almost called you Dad,” he said to change the subject.

A plethora of emotions passed through Phil; confliction, relief and fulfilment. It made sense though, for him to have that reaction. Wilbur had been the only person to ever call Phil ‘Dad’. Techno never did—partly because he didn’t feel like Phil was his father, despite the legality of it all. More like an older friend who provided for him when he most needed it.

“He called me it earlier as well,” Phil said, yet the words didn’t match the affection in his voice.

“Admit it. You like how comfortable Tommy feels with you,” he teased.

“Shut it.”

“Dadza is in the process of kidnapping another child.”

“It’s not kidnapping—” Phil exclaimed.

“That’s exactly what a kidnapper would say.”

“I can’t deal with you.”

“Your fault for marrying a woman and creating me,” he quipped, light-heartedly.

The fondness Phil exhibited dimmed for a moment. Wilbur realised why. He had never referenced his mother before in a joking way, or even at all. He tended to ignore talking about her with Phil, unless he was shouting at him (the garden incident wasn’t one of his best moments).

“You’re also blaming Kristin with that, marriage is a two-sided business,” Phil said back, though it was forced. Almost as if he was out of his comfort zone—which he was. Neither of them was used to discussing *this*, especially with each other.

Yet, Phil wasn’t subtle with how he wanted the conversation to continue.

“We’re really behind on dealing with that, aren’t we?” Wilbur grunted, bitter with himself.

“Whenever you’re ready, you can talk to me about your mother, Wilbur.”

He sighed. Most of his therapy sessions were about his mother and her unexplained illness that seemingly came out of nowhere but was gradual at the same time. She began to lose parts of herself and tire more easily when she continued her job that she put on hold when Wilbur was born. Even the ravens that followed her everywhere seemed to lose their vitality as well.

“I need to figure out what’s going on with Tommy before I deal with Mum,” he whispered.

Phil clasped his hand over Wilbur’s shoulder and squeezed it before letting go. “All I ask for is that one day, we talk about it. The matter of when it happens doesn’t bother me.”

Wilbur nodded, emotionally exhausted, and got up from the edge of Tommy’s bed. “See you in the morning.”

As soon as Tommy could look forward without throwing up and *think* things, he immediately wanted to be ill again. Not because he missed dying inside, but because he remembered the shit he did whilst sick. Calling Wilbur and Phil what he did was just embarrassing. Humiliating and all other dramatic synonyms.

It was slightly dark outside, probably early evening. He opened his phone to multiple missed messages from Tubbo and Ranboo in the group chat and scrolled up to the earliest ones.

Bench trio:

Tubbo: tommy is this ur attempt to get out of not attending my family’s BBQ?

Ranboo: Tubbo he’s actually sick

[image attached] Phil sent me this

Tubbo: farming awws and also ew.

uh, get well soon ig Tommy

Ranboo: no empathy, you have no empathy.

Tubbo: I wanted to cook him a burger and his illness ruined it, leave me alone

Although he would never let Tubbo cook *anything* for him, he was disappointed he couldn't have gone to the barbeque. The number of jokes he would have made about putting Benson onto the grill and asking for a duck burger. A missed opportunity.

Phil entered the room and the redness returned to his face. If Phil brought up what Tommy called him whilst sick, he was going to pry open those suicide prevention windows and jump out of them.

"Are you feeling any better today?" Phil asked as he placed a mug into his hands. Tommy took a sip of the coconut water. He hated coconuts but Phil made it for him so he felt obligated.

"Yeah, I think I'm fine now," he answered.

Phil sat on the space next to him. "You sure? You don't have a headache or—?"

"No, no I'm good," he interrupted, not used to being *this* looked after.

"Your fever delayed a lot of important conversations," Phil said, confusing him. It didn't help that his mind went to the worst possible conversation he could have with a temporary foster family.

He gulped and waited for Phil to continue, clenching his fist to stop it from shaking.

"Your sixteenth birthday is soon," he continued. Fear loomed over him. "What do you want for it?"

Time.

That was what he wanted. More time to spend with the family he had grown to love and friends he didn't want to leave behind.

He bit on the inside of his cheek, stopping himself from blurting out that answer. "I just want to spend time with you guys, nothing special."

It hurt to say that because he knew that he wouldn't even spend the day with them. At the stroke of midnight on April ninth, death would catch up to him.

It was obvious Phil wasn't satisfied with that answer but he didn't push him for another.

"Okay," he said. "Also, your social worker is calling you soon since you were too ill for the visit to happen yesterday."

As soon as the words left his mouth, Tommy's phone vibrated. It was an unknown number. Probably Linda.

"Oh, that'll be her. You can have dinner after downstairs or in your room." And with that, he left.

Rolling his eyes, Tommy accepted the call. The phone call began normally—meaning Linda was still being an annoying bitch but not seeing her shit sense of fashion or yellow teeth helped dull his anger. She was more focused on how the Crafts dealt with him whilst he was sick, if there were any red flags or neglect, and even though Tommy hardly remembered any of it (besides the embarrassing parts), he was confident that they took care of him.

But her next question caught him off guard.

“Has Phil gone through the papers with you yet?”

Tommy frowned, gripping the phone tighter. “What papers?”

“Oh...” she muttered and confused him even more. “He hasn’t discussed that with you yet then.”

She wasn’t normally *this* vague. But she seemed pretty focused on dropping that topic no matter the number of questions Tommy kept asking her about what papers she was talking about. In the end, she had to ‘politely’ hang up, saying she had gathered all the notes she needed for this visit.

He stared down at the phone screen, bewildered at just what happened. But the glaring digits underneath the time on the screen caught his eye.

It was Sunday the seventh of April. He had two days to live.

He rushed to get changed, packed up his bag with what he needed and left the house, ignoring the calls for him from the kitchen.

He entered the local café, knowing Niki had a shift, and sat at his normal table. Ignoring the looks he got from the other customers, he sorted through the pages from the Greek myth plastic folder until the last customer left for the night.

It didn’t take that long and Niki sat down opposite him, her apron still tied around her waist.

“Why have you decided to visit me today whilst you’re ill?” Niki asked, sliding him over a glass of water instead of the usual Coke she would give him.

“I need your help,” he said and gestured to the pages scattered all over the table surface. “I told Ranboo about my curse and he made these for me.”

“Ranboo?” she questioned as she picked up one of the pages, the myth of Arachne.

“Don’t ask, I hate him but I needed to tell someone.” Niki rolled her eyes, knowing he was talking shit.

“So you want me to go through these with you?” He nodded at her and the two began their research. Niki’s way of deducting what myths didn’t apply to Tommy was a lot cleaner than his since she just placed it on a different pile whilst he screwed it up into a ball and failed to throw it into one of the bins.

Tommy read over the page in his hands. “I could be Atlas since I never catch a fucking break.” Niki gave him a look. “What? Look, I feel like I have to carry the weight of the sky all the time.”

“That’s just anxiety.”

“Okay, you’re right but—”

“Your reasoning is too vague,” she interrupted and pointed at a section of Atlas’ fact file. “Do you share any similarities with his mythology?”

He paused to read the document again.

“Did you do anything bad, like something the equivalent of declaring war against the Gods and losing?” Niki asked.

“No,” he said. “Well, not in this life at least.”

“What?”

“My Icarus life was a bit weird. This cult in Transylvania believed they had God’s power, they were rivals against the Church of Prime and tried to kill me when I didn’t listen to them. Burning down their barn to the ground could’ve counted as declaring war.”

“How is that related to Icarus?”

“To be honest, I’ve repressed that for a reason,” he admitted. He was conflicted over that life since a part of him still believed in Prime, but he’d rather forget that ever happened.

“What about a female myth?” Niki suggesting, not liking the guilt on Tommy’s face. “You remind me of Arachne.”

He frowned at her. As much as Arachne sounded like him, since defying Gods and getting fucked over for it—thank you Zagreus, you piece of shit— *was* his speciality, there was one flaw with that idea.

“But she’s a woman.”

“And?”

“Male myths only.”

Niki narrowed her eyes. “Well, we don’t know if it’s gender-specific.”

“I’ve only had male myths,” Tommy said. “Did have any male myths?”

“No, but—”

“Then I’m not Arachne.”

“Isn’t a bit sexist for Dream to make your myths based on gender?”

Tommy scoffed, “This is Dream we’re talking about, the God who endorses cyclical child death. Do you really think he draws the line at sexism?”

“Fair point.”

Despite how their discussion went on for a while, they got nowhere with what myth Tommy could be. He groaned as he binned another page (he didn’t think he was Adonis—even though he wanted women to fight over him). Niki had her glasses on and tiredness in her posture, hunched over and heavy-eyed, her nose crinkled with frustration.

“We can continue this tomorrow if you’re up for it,” Tommy offered.

Niki let out a huff of relief. “Thank God, I don’t think I can read anymore about the bullshit the Gods get away with just because they have ichor in their blood.”

She got up and began to wipe down the tables as Tommy picked up the screwed up paper he threw on the floor. He didn’t want to leave yet though just in case this was the last time he could enjoy himself with her and not stress over his impending death.

As he helped her close up shop, he remembered something.

“Hey, do you remember when I first helped you close shop?” Niki nodded. “You still owe me that favour you promised me.”

Her eyebrows furrowed, not favouring the grin on his face. “What do you want?”

He paused, thinking of things he hadn’t done before—in any of his lives—and what would be fun with her.

“I’ve never baked before.”

A shy smile curled on Niki’s lips. “You want to bake with me?”

“Hell yeah, I do,” he confirmed and her smile grew.

“Do you like the sound of baking some cookies?”

Tommy nodded and followed her to the kitchen. She put on music (of course, it was one of Wilbur’s Spotify playlists) and ordered him around for the next hour. Fortunately, Niki had already prepared the pastry so he dodged a bullet with ruining it. He was in charge of creating the filling for the cookies and did the job ‘perfectly’ (his words, not Niki’s because what he made looked like dog shit). It wasn’t his fault he went overboard with combining almonds, sesame seeds and cinnamon. He did manage to get honey in his hair at one point though, which Niki kept taking pictures of.

Together, they shaped the pastry, furnishing it with the filling, and folded them over into half-moon shapes. As the cookies baked, Tommy sat on top of the counter as Niki sang along to the song currently playing.

“What cookies are these anyway?” he asked.

“Patouda cookies.” He didn’t recognise the name. “They’re Cretan.”

“Cretan?”

“They’re traditionally from Crete, the Greek island,” she explained, not noticing the discomfort that flashed over Tommy’s face.

“Oh,” he exhaled.

“Do you not like Cretan food?”

He rubbed his wrist roughly. “No, it’s just that my first myth was Theseus. Crete had a big part to play in that.”

Niki nodded understandingly. “Defeats the mighty Minotaur and exiled.”

“Fitting, isn’t it?” he said, his voice sour. He huffed and jumped down from the counter. Even though he reconciled with Tobias (which was very one-sided—obviously), it still hurt. He stared at the Patouda cookies, they were a deep golden colour. “Are they ready now?”

Niki took them out of the oven when she saw the colour. “Now we have to dust them in icing sugar.”

“That powder looks like something else,” he said as she sprinkled it over the baked cookies.

“If that is a drug joke, I swear to God,” she groaned. He giggled and helped her coat the cookies in a fuck-ton of white powder.

After they had finished, Niki moved to sit down on the tables, but Tommy stopped her.

“Nope, we are not eating my first ever baked creation in a café,” he said. “I know a place we can eat them.”

He took her to the bench by the seawall. It seemed appropriate, especially after the Greek myth session they had earlier.

“Any reason this bench is important?” she asked as she took a bite out of her cookie.

“I take refuge here whenever I need to think about something,” he said, surprised at his honesty. “It’s... this place is comforting. No one else knows about this.”

“Well, thank you for trusting me with this gatekept location,” she expressed, beaming when Tommy laughed.

He closed his eyes for a moment and let himself be taken by the sounds of the waves crashing against the seawall. “I wish I could spend more time here.”

“What’d you mean?” she tilted her head at him. “You have another year, don’t you?”

His stomach clenched. A sombre look phased through him. “Niki, I have two days.”

Her eyes widened. “Two days? Why only two?”

“My sixteenth birthday is in two days,” he explained.

“And?”

“Niki, we only have until we’re sixteen to figure out our myths,” he stated, more confused than hurt. After all, she should *know* this.

Niki let out a gasp. “You died when you were sixteen?”

“Uh, yeah, but why does that matter?”

“Tommy, I had until I was twenty-one to guess my myth.”

Her words left him stumped.

“You have two days?” she panicked. “I thought you died when you were seventeen.”

“Why- why did you have more time than me?” he choked out, his throat constricted.

“Your rebirth cycle depends on the age you died in your first life.”

His confusion replaced itself with anger. All these people had more time than him. Tobias had forty fucking years, his brother died in his mid-twenties and his father was even older. They all reached adulthood and he hadn’t even lived at sixteen.

No wonder he could never figure it out—they had years more than him to analyse their lives, to deduct their myths, to *live*.

Tears threatened to spill. The ocean waves weren’t comforting anymore.

Niki pushed his shoulder to make him face her. “You need to tell your family about the curse, Tommy.”

“You can’t make me—” he vexed, seething.

“You have two days. Two fucking days!” she shouted, her breathing irregular.

“Niki,” he bit out, not wanting to hear this bullshit. He thought she knew all along that he didn’t have much time left—he was glad she didn’t freak out over it but no. Just like everything else in his life, Tommy was wrong.

“Tell Techno, Tommy,” she persisted. “If you don’t want to tell anyone else in your family, tell him.”

A coldness seeped through him as she continued to stare at him, her gaze unbending.

“Fine! Fine, I’ll tell him, Jesus Christ. I’ll do it when I get home.”

“Good, good,” she sighed, relieved. Her eyes were still glassy.

“You fine now or...?”

“Stop making it out like I’m overreacting for worrying that you might die soon,” she snapped.

He bit on his cheek. “Sorry.”

“No, no don’t apologise,” she whispered and looked down at the cookies. The revelation killed both their appetites. “I just don’t want you to die, Tommy.”

“Me neither,” he agreed, sombre. The corners of his eyes dampened as he observed the rough sea over the wall. Not even the bench could bring him the solace he needed right now.

Chapter End Notes

I have like 2 weeks to finish this before my uni starts. oh no. i'm in danger.

speed-running time ig

Chapter 24

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He had been staring at the front door for the past ten minutes, psyching himself up. It wasn't that the door was locked or anything, it was more what faced him on the other side. He promised Niki he would tell Techno about his curse as soon as he got home and here he was. There was no avoiding it but that didn't stop him from trying to.

To put it simply, he was scared. Scared of the possibility that the family he loved wouldn't believe him. Yet, Techno was smart, he knew of the Greek myths and had even gifted him a children's book about it. He would understand.

Curling his shaking hand in his pocket, Tommy opened the door. Silence greeted him. The house was empty. Though, the shed light reflected against the living room glass door so Wilbur was home. He expected everyone to be in, especially as it was a Sunday evening.

Confused, he took out his phone.

Anime Man:

Tommy: where are you?

Technoblade: At work, stop texting me nerd.

Tommy: I need to talk to you

It's urgent

Technoblade: Uh, how urgent?

Tommy: life or death

Technoblade: The latest I can get home is 1am. Maybe midnight if it's that important.

As much as he prided himself to be a patient person (he wasn't), it was justified for Tommy to be a *bit* impatient with how that was hours away. It would be the eighth of April by then with one day left—he couldn't wait that long.

His finger hovered over the call button, tempted to just tell him over the phone and deal with a signature 'heh?' on a phone line. But before he could force himself to do it, the glass door slid open.

Wilbur had bloodshot eyes, probably from a mixture of crying and smoking whatever shady shit he housed in that shed. His hands tremored and he froze when he noticed Tommy by the table. Yet, Wilbur focused more on the red of Tommy's sweatshirt, a dazed look in his gaze. He either hated the colour red or realised that the clothes Tommy had on were his (anything hanging on the bannister became Tommy's property, it was common knowledge).

"How'do?" he said, attempting to keep it not awkward as he nodded at Wilbur. It was weird between them, weirder than usual because of how it was two-sided now. Whatever recently fucked with Wilbur made him act strangely with Tommy.

"Are you feeling any better?" Wilbur asked, hesitant.

"Yeah, I'm not ill anymore." He fiddled with his hands as Wilbur continued to stare at the red on his shirt, almost as if he were in a trance or some sort of state.

He noted the time on his phone and bit his cheek, conflicted. It seemed like Wilbur was the only one home and technically, Niki told him to tell *someone* in his family and didn't specify Techno at first. Even with the dubious memories Wilbur had and the relation to his brother, it was still Wilbur. Someone he trusted more than he should for only knowing him for six months. If he were to say which member of the Crafts broke his rule of attachment first, he couldn't lie to himself and not say it was Wilbur. As with everything, it all came down to him.

Fuck it, he was going to tell Wilbur.

Tommy went to speak but the man spoke before him, "Wanna watch something?"

He closed his mouth, not expecting that.

"Watch what?" he asked as Wilbur took off his jacket.

"I don't know, you decide. I'll make drinks," and with that, Wilbur walked to the kitchen, leaving a stumped Tommy behind.

Shrugging off the oddness of this entire situation, Tommy pocketed his phone and searched through the shelf of DVD cases.

His hand stopped on a certain golden DVD case. He opened the case of 'Hamilton' to see an old post-it note with a heart drawn on it, signed off with the letter 'K'.

As Wilbur returned to the living room with two drinks, his face dropped at the chosen DVD in Tommy's hands.

"I've never watched 'Hamilton' before and you have a poster of it in your room," Tommy said, frowning at Wilbur's expression.

The man sat down, his leg bouncing against the floor. Tommy placed the musical on the coffee table.

"We don't have to watch it if you don't want to," he offered.

“No, no it’s fine,” Wilbur said, his voice slightly shaky. “I’ll watch it with you.”

He attempted to give Tommy a smile but it didn’t reach his eyes and gestured for him to put the DVD into the player. Reluctantly, he did so.

“It’s not like it’s based on true events or anything,” he joked as he sat down next to Wilbur and took one of the cups.

Wilbur chuckled lightly. “You are so…” he trailed off, shaking his head. His smile became a bit more real.

It was safe to say that Tommy very much regretted choosing this musical as soon as it started. He wasn’t aware that Wilbur was a ‘Hamilton’ stan; he knew every fucking word to every single song and even forced Tommy to join in with some of the choreography at some point. He voiced one of the characters and gave him a New Zealand accent despite the fucker being American.

Tommy liked it though, partly because his own commentary and misconceptions about American history kept making the man burst out laughing and the strain in Wilbur’s shoulders dissipated as the musical continued.

He enjoyed himself that evening, too much for a cursed boy on a shrinking time limit. There were moments where he forgot that the curse existed, that he came into this house for a reason, to tell someone about it and get the help and support he desperately needed.

As Wilbur went to get popcorn (salted, of course), Tommy’s phone vibrated. Phil was calling him.

“Hey, I was just checking to see if you’re alright,” Phil said on the other side of the phone. “There’s traffic so I’ll be a bit late home.”

Tommy brought the phone closer to his ear. “No I’m not alright, I may be not violently throwing up anymore but Will keeps singing over ‘Hamilton’ with his shit voice and I hate it here.”

A brief silence accompanied them. Tommy checked if the call was still going on. “Phil?”

“Sorry, uh- sorry it surprised me,” Phil spluttered out. “It’s just that… Wilbur hasn’t watched that since his mother passed. It was their favourite musical.”

He froze in his seat. At least that explained Wilbur’s initial reaction to Tommy choosing this to watch. Though, it confused him why Wilbur didn’t protest more against watching it, why he even allowed Tommy to put it on.

“Oh,” he said into the phone, speechless.

He didn’t know how to react or even feel. Maybe warmed that Wilbur trusted him enough to share something with him that was tied so closely to his mother. It was times like this where Tommy was glad he confided with Wilbur that night about his own mother’s death in his last life. The visit to the graveyard and peaceful sunrise by his foster brother’s side.

“Um,” Phil muttered, breaking Tommy out of his thoughts. “I’ll be back soon, have fun with Wilbur.”

The man hung up and left Tommy conflicted on the sofa. Wilbur sat down next to him with a bowl of popcorn and a smile brightened up his lips.

“Are you going to press play then?” he asked, furthering Tommy’s mental turmoil.

What made it different? Why was Wilbur almost eager to finish the same musical he associated with a deceased parent? A selfish part of him hoped it was because he was there to sit through it with Wilbur. That *his* company fixed the broken connotations. With the glances Wilbur kept throwing his way every time Tommy laughed at a certain part of the musical, his hopes could be correct.

But, as the credits rolled and the laughter between them faded, Tommy remembered. He needed to do what he promised Niki. It was only eleven o’clock and Techno would take too long.

He turned to face Wilbur, thankful that this evening with him dissolved the resemblance to W. Soot for now.

“I need to tell you something,” he stammered, pushing the weighed words off his tongue. “But I...” a coldness spread over his chest.

“You can tell me anything, Toms,” Wilbur assured with his hand on Tommy’s shoulder comfortingly. The touch tingled his skin, it felt stable. “Take your time.”

He bit on his cheek, his teeth aching from his clenched jaw. He just needed to spit it out, to confide in his family and for Wilbur to believe him. Out of everyone, he most desired Wilbur’s soothing presence and reassurance that he was going to figure it out. He didn’t want to die on him.

Yet, Tommy didn’t where to start. He looked up at Wilbur, relishing in the warm, honey shade, grateful for there was no dark shadow, no existence of his brother in those eyes.

He glanced down at his exposed tattoo, the black ink taunting him.

“I’m cursed,” he blurted out, eyes set on Wilbur’s face, hoping for that collected concern and vulnerability to remain. “It’s going to kill me on my birthday and I need your help.”

Wilbur’s brows furrowed. “Cursed? Tommy, what? Should we go to the hospital or—?”

“No!” his voice wavered. Wilbur’s grip on his shoulder softened. “It’s not like that it’s- just hear me out.”

The man nodded with such sincerity that Tommy, despite the hammering of his heart, felt safe. Safe to continue and pour his heart out to him, to finally share his struggles and accept that he needed more help.

He exhaled lightly before continuing, “Y’know Greek mythology, right? So, I’ve been cursed by this God to be reborn until I turn sixteen unless I work out what myth is influencing my life. And I’ve,” his voice broke, “I’ve died so many fucking times.”

Wilbur frowned at him, the sincerity that adorned his face soured. “What?”

“Will, okay, please,” he pleaded as he brought Wilbur’s hand closer to him only for the man to shrug off his grip. His brain rattled, thoughts flying too fast. He couldn’t think straight. “This tattoo is proof, I could get my notebook. It’s the same fucking book with my diary entries and- I’m telling the truth. I was Theseus, then Icarus and—”

“Tommy, what the fuck are you going on about?” Wilbur’s lip curled into a snarl laced with confusion. The same stability Wilbur filled him with crumbled.

“I’m not finished!” he shouted. He just needed Wilbur to listen and to stop looking at him like *that*. “You’re- you’re my brother. You were cursed too but not *you*. It’s hard to explain.” His breathing quickened. “You’re W. Soot, you don’t remember because Zagreus drowned you and trapped you in Tartarus.”

Wilbur flinched back. “Shut up,” he hissed.

“Please Wilbur. Zagreus, he—”

“No, shut up,” he repeated, harsher. “Shut up, shut the *fuck* up!” he clutched at his head with his hands, fear welling in his face. “How do you know that name? How do you know Zagreus?”

“He’s the one who cursed me.”

“You’re lying, you’re fucking—” Wilbur cut himself off, his chest gasping unruly breaths. He got up from the sofa, unsteady on his feet, glaring at Tommy with anger he didn’t understand.

“I’m not lying!” he yelled. “Why don’t you believe me?”

“Why don’t I?” Wilbur scoffed, his eyes narrowed. “Are you fucking delusional? Do you know how insane you sound? Really, Tommy, rebirth? Curses?”

Tommy stayed sitting, his face pale with shock. He couldn’t stop his hands from shaking. He didn’t expect this, he didn’t expect Wilbur to react like *this*.

He couldn’t breathe. He couldn’t handle the repulsion in Wilbur’s face being directed towards *him*. He never wanted Wilbur to look at him like that. Like everyone else in his life had, the people in those fostering homes, the failed families of his past lives. Wilbur looked at him like his brother did whenever he disobeyed his orders—whenever he displeased his tyranny.

“What other shit did you lie about?” Wilbur gestured to the paused musical on the TV and disgust twisted his mouth. “Did you lie about that too?”

Confused, he shook his head, not knowing what he was referring to.

“Did your mum even die or was that just bullshit as well?”

“She did die!” he retorted, enraged that Wilbur would even *suggest* that he lied about that. “She was my Sisyphus mother and—”

Wilbur recoiled, betrayal written all over him. “You’re a fucking liar,” he spat with hatred. He turned his head. “You... I can’t deal with you right now.”

Tears brimmed in Tommy’s eyes. He was shaking.

“Oh, come on,” Wilbur scorned, uncaring. “You didn’t seriously think that I’d believe this shit, did you?”

Tommy’s bottom lip trembled. “What happened to your promise?” he asked, the volume of his own voice startled him. “*I won’t hurt you like he did*,” he repeated from that night. “Then what the fuck is this? You’re just like him, even if you don’t remember it.”

Wilbur grasped Tommy by his shirt and shoved him backwards until his back hit the wall. His heart raced, a gasp left his lips. He was back in the ravine, his feet dangling hopelessly as his brother held him by his throat and strangled the breath out of him.

“Shut the fuck up,” Wilbur seethed, his teeth gritted. Eyes dark, just like *his*. “I’m not him, I’m not—”

“Believe me, I can prove it, Will, please,” he begged, desperately fighting to breathe despite having no pressure around his neck.

He winced as Wilbur’s hold tightened, his back dug into the cold plaster.

“You lied- you lied about *everything*! And now you’re... I’m not that person, I’m not W. Soot.” He pushed Tommy further against the wall before releasing his grip. Tommy fell to the floor, his shoulders stinging.

Wilbur peered down at him, steeping in loathing, and uttered the very words that destroyed him whole, “I don’t trust you anymore.”

He trembled on the floor. His back ached, the scars of Theseus throbbing against the wall that his big brother had shoved him into and it *hurt*. Wilbur didn’t trust him, he didn’t care about him. He was a fucking idiot to think that this would’ve been his second chance, that this family would’ve saved him. He always thought he didn’t deserve this home, this *home*. It seemed his doubts were proven right.

Just like with Theseus, he was deemed unlovable by his own family.

As Tommy shrunk deeper into himself, Wilbur paced across the living room. “I should’ve listened to your social worker on day one.”

Tommy’s breath hitched. With his legs unstable, he got up from the floor using the wall to support him.

“The fuck does that mean?” he demanded, scared of the awaiting answer.

“She warned us that you’d pull something like this, that you’re a pathological liar and all that other shit, you’d cause us problems one day but... I didn’t think you’d do *this*,” Wilbur fumed, spitting out the same phrases that he never wanted to hear come out of his mouth.

Tommy, with blurred vision, gazed at him and his brother stared back. Fists clenched, his shoulders tense, lip twisted in anger, and eyes as dark as the ravine walls.

“Y’know what, I hope you remember,” Tommy snapped, acidly. “I fucking wish you remember so you’re the reason your little brother dies for the second time.”

His words hung dead in the air. Pain flashed across Wilbur’s face. A heavy and thick silence crowded the room.

With his chest heaving and tears threatening to spill, he ran. He couldn’t be here, he *shouldn’t* be here with a family he didn’t deserve and trust he was bound to break. He didn’t have them anymore. He didn’t have Wilbur.

His lungs screamed out as his legs propelled him forward to *somewhere*. No matter how fast he ran, nothing—absolutely nothing—would let him forget the heartless look on Wilbur’s face as the love the man felt for him died.

It didn’t surprise him where he ended up. The bench by the seawall. A place that brought him comfort and solace now deemed a grave for the festering darkness in his head.

He didn’t sit down on the bench this time, as much as his legs wanted to give out from where they stood. Instead, he leaned against the seawall, staring out longingly at the high tide and the big drop. For a sick moment, he couldn’t help but wonder how cold those waves were, how long it would take for him to reach the shallow waters if he jumped. Such a fate was only seconds away from becoming real.

His phone vibrated in his pocket. Someone was calling him. He picked up his phone and threw it over the seawall, craving the cracking sound it produced. The same sound his bones would make if he—

“Tommy?” a gentle and hesitant voice called. “I thought you’d be here.”

It was Niki.

“Wilbur told me you ran away,” she said.

Tommy’s lips thinned. “Is that all he said happened?”

She joined his side, her shoulder bristled against his. “What happened, Tommy?”

His jaw clenched, the pain in his back reliving the spliced memory of the rough ravine and cold plaster of the house wall. If he closed his eyes for long enough, the hold Wilbur had on his shoulders meshed with his brother’s chokehold.

“I lied to you before,” he whispered, quiet under the wind. “My brother wasn’t taken into the Elysian Fields. He was drowned in the Lethe and sent to Tartarus.”

Niki stilled beside him. Her hand clasped the necklace.

“Dream broke his curse and rebirthed him for one last time,” he continued, strained. “This time, in the body of Wilbur.” His eyes watered. “He’s beginning to remember being *him*, Niki. And now he hates me.”

He bit back a sob, his loveless thoughts infesting his head. “I thought I was Perseus for a while because I felt happy and he’s the guy who had a happy ending,” he revealed, glaring at the calming tide. “But I’m not. I don’t get to have that.”

“Tommy, it’s okay,” Niki mumbled, still in shock. “It’s going to be okay.”

“Is it? Is it really?” he asked, his voice raising.

Niki didn’t answer.

His eyes lowered to the rocks by the bottom of the seawall. An inviting distance. “I don’t have a physical scar for Sisyphus,” he said. “It’s more of a permanent mental scar, reminding me every once and a while that I killed myself in that life.”

“You- you... how?”

“I guessed incorrectly on purpose. I realised when I lost everything again that I could just restart. And I don’t know if I want to continue again. Wilbur hates me. Phil and Techno *will* hate me and...” he trailed off, numb to his swelling tears. “My last moments in this life won’t even be with the people I love, the family I always wanted.”

“I won’t let that happen.”

Tommy scoffed, his voice empty and worthless. “What can you do to help me, Niki?”

She froze.

“What are you going to do to save me when I don’t even want to save myself anymore?” he yelled, the seawall echoing his agony. Her eyes began to water. He was scaring her. “I want to be alone.”

She eventually left and the tears he had been holding in for *months* finally fell.

A part of him just wanted to blurt out Perseus’ name, for the winds to sweep up the incorrect guess. He wanted it to be true. So much so that it frightened him.

At that moment, death by wishing for a happy ending didn’t seem so bad.

He just wanted to be hugged by Phil again, make Techno laugh and have his hair ruffled by Wilbur—

Apparently, that was too much to ask for.

He rubbed his face with his sweatshirt sleeve and the once calming scent of Wilbur overwhelmed his nose. He was still wearing Wilbur's clothes. Sobs wrenched his chest as he scrambled to take it off. He stood apathetic to the iced breeze that pricked at the skin his underneath t-shirt didn't cover.

With a deadened glare, he stared at the crumpled clothing on the floor.

Tommy had grown used to people dying on him but being abandoned by the living hurt the most.

As his eyes drooped shut, his body slacked against the bench. Alone with nothing but the waves to keep him company.

He found himself standing on top of the maze walls in the void. Reminiscent of simpler times where jumping off would do more good for him than bad, just like in exile.

"You still haven't figured it out yet?" a voice said softly. Dream.

He didn't turn to look at him, his eyes stayed blank and set on the bottomless bit below him. There was a beach in the distance with the same cloaked figure from the palace on it. The veil on the bonnet seemed darker. The figure nodded at him.

Dream moved Tommy's shoulders to face him. Rips ruined Dream's cloak, scratches decorated the amulet around his neck.

"Wilbur abandoned you, how much clearer can it get?" Dream said with a desperate tone. With his words, the fight in Tommy kindled. "Look around you, what do you see?"

He was so fucking *sick* of being played like this, pushed around and tormented all in the name's sake of his myth. An oblivious pawn to a corrupt game manufactured for the amusement of the Gods. He just wanted a happy ending, a family that unconditionally loved him, regardless of his flaws and mistakes. People who readily accepted him. But Tommy was naïve to think the Gods would hand him such human necessity on a silver platter.

He hounded his gaze on Dream, murder in his eyes. *This* was the person who took Wilbur from him, who made Wilbur have his brother's memories and slowly remember them.

"Do you really want to know what I see, Dream?" he said, his tone bitter.

His lips pursed.

“I see the shell of a broken God who lives through those he tortures, just for a speck of entertainment to make him forget that even though he has ichor flowing through his veins, he is a minor God, no longer worshipped nor cared about,” he spat. “You’re a product of unconsented adultery, a failure to your father and trauma for your mother.”

His shoulders brushed against Dream’s. “I bet the reason you chose reincarnation to fuck with us was that you wanted someone else to feel the same hurt you felt.” He tilted his head mockingly with a cruel grin. “Do you remember, Zagreus, when you were killed, torn apart by the Titans after Zeus tried to find some *use* for you, and you were reborn into another body? You weren’t even your own mother’s son anymore.”

He stepped closer. “I bet Persephone couldn’t look at you the same way because you weren’t *hers*.”

Dream flinched.

“Is that why you like this, Zagreus? When you see me grow attached to a family, do you feel a bit of pleasure in ripping me away from them the second they see me as *theirs*?”

His chest heaved. The emotionless stare from the blood-stained mask only irritated him further.

He prodded at Dream’s chest. “I swear to you, if I don’t figure this out and you let me die, as soon as I’m reborn and can speak, I will say every incorrect myth until you grow tired of watching a mere baby kill itself over and over again.” A sick and twisted look morphed onto his face. “Or I wonder, would that entertain you more?”

Dream reached forward and pushed Tommy off the maze wall, gripping onto the neck of his t-shirt so he dangled off the edge. Instead of fear he felt earlier against Wilbur’s grip, it was *adrenaline*. He felt alive.

He grinned in the face of death. “Do it, throw me off like you did in my first life.”

Dream’s hold faltered, his feet skid against the edge.

“What was it that I said to you whilst I begged for mercy? *Dream, Dream please, I thought you were my friend—!*” he laughed, hollow and empty. “I’m done caring. At this point, I’m done giving a shit whether I live or die, so do it. Fucking kill me. It wouldn’t be the first time I die alone.”

Dream released his grip and clutched Tommy close to his chest before gravity took its toll. With one hand Dream steadied Tommy and with the other, he ripped his own mask off. Just as he predicted, a broken man was underneath that mask; scars and fresh wounds embellished his sickly pale face. Green eyes glistened in the void, the same eyes that seemed empathetic and loving in exile.

He cradled Tommy’s face, his skin was cold and frail. “You were always my favourite,” Dream whispered, his thumb wiping the tears off Tommy’s cheeks. “I don’t know how to make your myth clearer to you.”

Guilt riddled in Dream's voice, suffering creased his forehead. It reminded Tommy of when he honestly believed the disguised God cared about him at the beginning of his exile—where the unmasked man would help him built a tent and gifted him a jukebox to drown out the harrowing silence at night just so he could sleep. But of course, it was a lie, a cruel game of Lycomedes.

"If I'm your favourite, you wouldn't want me to go, would you?" Tommy asked, trying to get his hold off his face. But it wouldn't budge.

"I do," he said, so quiet it broke. "Tommy, I want you to be free."

He stepped backwards, the wind against his neck. "Then why leave me with a life that isn't worth living in the end?"

The hatred built up in Wilbur's face flickered past his eyes. The venomous words pierced his ears and shattered the security he felt when around him. The bond between the foster brothers had been ruined by Tommy's own doing, his curse, his fucked up life.

It was his fault.

"Wake up, Tommy," he muttered. A shadow shaped like a hand came over Dream's shoulder, a hawk of a raven resonated along the maze walls. The green in his eyes diminished. "Wake up and figure it out."

The shadows engulfed Dream whole.

Hands shook Tommy awake. Disorientated, with his wet eyelashes clumped together, the familiar crowned star constellation above his head looked duller than yesterday.

His fuzzy vision rendered two figures standing at the front of the bench. Ignoring the cries from his exhausted body, he sat up.

"Niki told me you were here," Tubbo said, distressed. Ranboo shrugged off his jacket and draped it over Tommy's shoulders.

He stood up and as he stared at the two of them, the tears returned. Tommy collapsed into Tubbo's arms, not caring about the height difference. His arms cradled the smaller boy's body and buried his face in Tubbo's neck, curling into the warmth.

Ranboo rested his arm across Tommy's neck with his other hand clutching Tubbo closer to the two of them. He refused to ease his hold, hating the part of him that wished for the weight of Ranboo's jacket to be Wilbur. He wanted him back.

He screwed his eyes shut, sobs left his lips as he crumbled further into Tubbo, trying to forget the yearning he will never satisfy.

"Come on, let's go back to mine," Tubbo whispered, tugging him along.

But Tommy didn't want to let go.

Chapter End Notes

also, fanart for this chapter in particular (ty jasper, you king).

[@Blue_tost](#)

Chapter 25

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He didn't remember the journey to Tubbo's house. But apparently, Ranboo carried him.

If it were another time, that would've bothered him. If he weren't so exhausted, then maybe he would have cared or even been embarrassed. But he felt nothing.

Tommy let himself be pushed onto Tubbo's bed, his head too numb to his surroundings. His eyes stung, yet he had no more tears left to shed. Emotions were too much for him. Everything was.

The fabric against the exposed skin of his legs, the scratching sensation of the bedframe digging into his scarred back, the itching of his nose as another wave of scents violated his nostrils. It was too much. All of it.

He wanted the fog to return, the clouds to overwhelm and leave him in a state of nothing. A place with no worries, no sadness nor abandonment. The room to rest until his final minute alive.

But he couldn't let that happen. Not when Tubbo and Ranboo were by his side, whispering between themselves, worried for him.

Soft and heavy hands pushed a hoodie over his head and down his back. It was one of Ranboo's hoodies. He forgot he only had a thin t-shirt on. Wilbur's clothes were probably still crumpled next to the bench, suffering the same deserted fate as Tommy.

As Ranboo helped aim Tommy's arms into the hoodie sleeves, he leaned into his friend's side, staying there with closed eyes, too scared to open them again. The mattress dipped and an arm curled around him.

Tommy melted into Ranboo's touch. "He was supposed to believe me," he whispered.

"Who was?"

"Wilbur."

Ranboo's hand rubbed circles onto his shoulder, though it did nothing to ease the resurfacing thoughts.

"I was so ready, Ranboo," he sobbed, empty and dry. "I was so ready to finally be happy and..."

He buried his head into Ranboo's side, hoping that the nestling of the bedsheets covered up his whimpers.

“Sleep, okay? We’ll handle this in the morning,” Ranboo muttered softly.

He shook his head and pried open his eyes. “No, no I can’t sleep.”

Ranboo sighed, his fingers brushing the hair next to the shell of Tommy’s ear.

“How about we force Tubbo to make some food for us then?” Ranboo offered, rolling his eyes at the look Tommy gave him. “There are smoke detectors in his kitchen, he’ll be fine.”

Tommy hummed, contemplating whether a house fire would make possibly his last day in this life better or worse. The hunger in his stomach decided for him.

After Tubbo managed not to wake up the entire household by setting off the fire and smoke alarms, the trio sat on the bed, eating pancakes. The early rising sun peeked through the shut curtains. Tommy rested his head on Tubbo’s legs, content whilst the other two played Super Smash Bros.

As he listened to Ranboo’s cackles and Tubbo’s string of swears, it hit him. This was probably the last time he’d ever see them in this life. The last time he’d see them at all.

He won’t have a person to torment for being taller than him and American, yet still be able to rely on for support; someone to tease for their addiction to online shooting games and obsession with South Park whilst also being thankful for how their cheerful presence always kept him warm. He will never again be a part of a trio that *worked*, a group he felt included in, appreciated and cared for.

Even if he did find people like this in the future, it wouldn’t be the same. It wouldn’t be *them*.

These were the people who laughed at his shitty jokes, were patient enough to deal with his endless bullshit and allowed themselves to be pushed around by *him* of all people.

He loved them.

A hand brushed along his arm. Ranboo noticed him staring off at the distance. “You with us?”

Tommy glanced up at Ranboo, glad that his mask and glasses were off just so he could see the expressions on his face. The candour swimming in his grey eyes, the concern furrowing his brows, the crinkle of a curious smile on his lips.

Without a second thought, he tackled Ranboo into a hug, ignoring Tubbo’s protests about their ongoing game.

“I still hate you by the way,” he mumbled into Ranboo’s shirt. Ranboo chuckled and secured his grip on him.

“Ah yes, it’s common to show your hatred for your enemies with affection.”

Tommy giggled at his sarcastic tone and let go, his arms tingled.

“I’m going to miss this,” he murmured, not intending for either of them to hear him.

The covers ruffled and Tubbo moved closer, the video game left paused.

“Alright, I’ve had enough of this shit,” Tubbo announced sharply. “What the fuck is up with you?”

Tommy huffed, knowing this conversation was inevitable.

“You act so off whenever death is mentioned, like don’t think I forgot that shit you pulled at Clementine’s party and your bucket list in London. You’re hiding something from us.” Tubbo looked over at Ranboo for support, but the other turned his head. He scowled, shrinking into himself, hurt flared in his face. “Okay, you’re hiding something from *me* then. Just me.”

“Tubs—”

“If the next thing that comes out of your mouth isn’t an explanation, I’m bringing Benson up here to bite you,” he threatened, glaring at them both. “Tell me.”

“How will I know you’ll believe me?” Tommy asked, hesitant.

“I trust you.” He flinched, the reminder of Wilbur still fresh in his head—his last confession of his curse had broken that trust he treasured.

He fidgeted with his sleeve. “Fine, fine,” he said as he bit on his lip, trying to stomach his next words. “I have this thing where I’m reincarnated into a different Greek myth that influences my life until I guess it correctly.”

He avoided Tubbo’s eyes, preparing himself to be yelled at again, for his words to be twisted and doubted by another person he wholeheartedly loved. He didn’t want to be turned away again, abandoned.

“Oh,” Tubbo exhaled with no disgust or anger. Instead, he seemed intrigued, excited. “So you’re like Tobias?”

Tommy froze, the strain in his shoulders stilled.

“What?”

Tubbo shrugged as if what he had said was part of a casual conversation. “Yeah, he was my great-grandfather, but he went by a different name since he didn’t want people to know he was... y’know *that* Tobias Underscore. Founder of Snowchester and all that shit.”

Tommy’s mouth gaped open. “You know about the curse?”

“He made sure that our bloodline knew and carried on the knowledge, but I don’t know if my parents have told Niki yet. I think his first myth was that person who opened a box or something? I don’t know Greek mythology—”

“Tubbo,” he interrupted. “You believe me?”

An honest grin curled its way onto Tubbo’s mouth. “Yeah, of course I do.”

Relief flooded through him. Holy fuck, he believed him. Tubbo *believed* him. No hands shoved him against the wall, dug his back into the wooden panels, no one shouted and looked down at him with a distrustful glare.

“What age did you die in your first life?” Tubbo asked.

The smile wiped off Tommy’s face. Fuck. Tubbo knew about that condition of the curse then. His eyes flickered between Tubbo and Ranboo, anxious to answer for both of their sakes.

“Why’s that important?” Ranboo said, confused.

Dread lodged in Tommy’s throat.

“It’s how long he has to figure it out until he dies again,” Tubbo explained, oblivious to Tommy’s distress.

Ranboo frowned. “But that means—” he stopped. Mouth slightly agape as he realised. “Tommy...” he panted, his voice wavering.

Tommy squirmed in his seat as guilt replaced the relief he felt only seconds ago. He sat helpless as Ranboo panicked, his breathing quickening as tears welled in his eyes.

“Why’d you lie to me?” Ranboo whispered, his lips trembling. His chest heaved as he failed to control his breathing. “I know I’m being a hypocrite since I told you that you don’t have to tell me everything. But why didn’t you tell me you had until your sixteenth birthday to guess?”

Tubbo made a noise of distress from beside them.

“I didn’t want to hurt you,” he muttered, remorse thick on his tongue. A tear slipped down Ranboo’s face and he flinched as if it burned him.

“Do you know what would’ve hurt me more?” Ranboo’s voice cracked as he wiped his face. “You dying when I thought you had until the rest of your life to figure it out.”

A wrecked cry left Tommy’s mouth. “I’m sorry.”

“You died when you were sixteen?” Tubbo faltered, in denial of the words he spoke.

The world caved in on him. He didn’t want them to find out that like *this*. He fucked up, he fucked it all up. He delayed this so he wouldn’t hurt them but he just gave them more pain, more heartache and unavoidable grief.

He was a bad friend. A bad brother. A bad *everything*.

“You have a day,” Ranboo said, trying to keep the pain out of his voice. Yet, the boy breathed with anguish and sorrow. “You have a day until...” he couldn’t even say it. He got up from the bed and began to pace, each step inflaming his agitation.

“You can’t go,” Tubbo declared, blinking away the wetness pooling in his eyes. “You can’t.”

“I’m sorry.”

“What am I without you?” Tubbo asked. His heart ached.

Tommy smiled sadly and adjusted the red bandana around Tubbo’s neck. “Yourself.”

His answer only seemed to sadden Tubbo even more.

“I love you guys,” he said, needing to say the words despite the pain it brought. “I don’t deserve you—”

Tubbo slapped him across the face.

“Don’t say that shit, dickhead.” Tubbo grabbed onto his shoulders, forcing Tommy to stare at him. “You don’t get to say that shit. You don’t- you don’t—”

Sobs broke his tough exterior. He fell forward and rested his forehead against Tommy’s as the tears fell.

“You deserve us, you deserve *them*, you...” he trailed off, his breathing picking up as Tommy clasped a hand on Tubbo’s cheek.

Tommy hushed him softly. “I get it. I get it, Tubs. I won’t say it again.”

“You better fucking not because it’s complete bullshit.”

“Though, you didn’t have to slap me to get the point across,” Tommy tried to joke.

Tubbo narrowed his eyes at him, sniffing into his sleeve. “How else am I supposed to knock sense into you?”

“The phrase ‘knocking sense’ into someone doesn’t have to be literal.”

“It is to me.”

Ranboo sat back down, his hands shaking. “You have less than twenty-four hours,” he said solemnly.

Tommy’s shoulders tensed and he nodded.

“I want to hate you,” he revealed, still crying. Tommy recoiled, but Ranboo gripped onto his hands. “I want to hate you so badly but I can’t. The first thing you did when you came into my life was insult me for being emotional over a video game and ever since then, you

wormed yourself into everything. You're my best friend." Ranboo, with glistening eyes, stared into Tommy's dying soul. "And you could die today."

Tommy shook his head. "I'll figure it out." He tried to pull every bit of confidence he could fake into his words, gather assurance that wasn't genuine, just for Ranboo to get that look of despair out of his face.

"And if you don't?" Ranboo hesitated to ask.

"I will." He squeezed Ranboo's hands. "I will figure out my myth."

A part of him started to accept it himself.

"What happened then?" Tubbo asked and Tommy tilted his head, confused. "Why were you at the bench?"

He paused and hugged the hoodie tighter around him. He was more embarrassed over it than anything, that he was such an idiot to think that Wilbur would believe him. Ranboo believed him because he was Ranboo, Tubbo already knew about the curse but Wilbur...

He thought the trust between them was enough for Wilbur to believe the unrealism of reincarnation and Greek Gods. But obviously not.

"I told Wilbur and he called me a liar," he eventually said. "He doesn't trust me now."

"You're not a liar, Tommy," Tubbo proclaimed, sincerely. "Wilbur's just too much of a little bitch to listen to you."

Tommy and Ranboo gave him a look. Tubbo rolled his eyes. "You're booing me but I'm right. This isn't a Wilbur Craft slander-free household."

"Tubbo, Wilbur is the reincarnation of W. Soot, but he just doesn't remember it," Ranboo explained.

"Oh," Tubbo said. "Still, he's a bitch."

Tommy turned to Ranboo. "He reacted to Zagreus' name, the God who cursed us all. He *knew* him."

"It makes sense though," Ranboo said. "If he's beginning to remember like you last told me, then he might remember the afterlife and rebirth parts of W. Soot's life."

"The last thing I said to him was that I hoped he remembered," he whispered, ashamed of himself. "I don't want that to happen."

It scared him. Not just Wilbur remembering the shit he put Tommy through during his first life, but the murders, crimes and innocent blood he spilt during his other lives. He would remember being a terrorist, a mass murderer in 1960s America.

This Wilbur cried whenever animals died on those nature shows, Tommy couldn't bear to think how he'd react to those memories.

"Well," Tubbo said, interrupting the taunts in his head. "I don't know how to help you with all *that*, but I can give you your birthday present early."

As much as that came out of nowhere, he appreciated the sentiment.

Tubbo handed him a squished toy in a clear plastic bag, the Amazon label still attached. He sighed before opening the bag, the tremors in his hands making it difficult.

It was a screwed up blue and magenta octopus plushie. One of those toys you could fold into itself to display two emotions with different colours and sown facial expressions.

"You wanted bitches, so I got you octopussy."

Tommy wheezed as Ranboo face-palmed. "Never say that again."

"How do you feel right now?" Tubbo asked as Tommy fiddled with the disfigured octopus.

He stared at the empty plate of pancakes on the side of the bed, the paused Super Smash Bros on the TV, the uncertainty in Tubbo's whatever-fucking-coloured eyes and the normal awkwardness of Ranboo's stature. For a moment in time, this was just a normal day with his two best friends.

Tommy pushed the octopus so it showed the happy side.

"You're farming awws," Tubbo scoffed. Tommy frowned and Tubbo pointed to Ranboo who was close to tears again.

"Is there a limit to how many times I can cause Ranboo to cry in one day?" Tommy asked. "Because I think I've exceeded it."

"Shut up," Ranboo grunted, lightly smacking the octopus out of his hands.

"You can't silence me," he quipped back. "Where's my present from you?"

"I don't have it with me," Ranboo said. "But it can be me helping you not die at the end of today."

Tommy bit on his cheek, considering the half-lidded eyes of his two best friends and the incoming brightness in the room from the rising sun.

"Can we sleep first?" he asked and continued as Ranboo went to protest. "We can go through possible myths I could be after when we have full brainpower."

Ranboo, after his many attempts at convincing him otherwise, eventually agreed.

As the three huddled on Tubbo's bed, Tommy sighed, knowing that he'd need to leave before either of them woke up. If he didn't leave, the last time they'd hold him would be his dead

body. The weight of a deceased loved one was a burden you never forgot.

With more light bleeding into the room, he shuffled out of Tubbo's tight grip and cried one last silent tear. He needed to go.

Chapter End Notes

a head's up, I may not be able to upload for a while (a while meaning like,,, two weeks? maybe one and a bit) because mans has uni and freshers week is gonna take up my time lmao.

Sorry about that, especially since this is lowkey a cliffhanger again—I didn't realise until now how many of these upcoming chapters end on a 'hurry up and explain wtf is happening' note. Whoops.

But I will finish this fanfic, no higher education bullshit shall stop me.

Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

I met tommyinnit irl the other day and he made me more insecure about my height so I sped ran this chapter x

sorry in advance

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Wilbur didn't smoke cigarettes that much. The problem began once his mother died and an instinct became apparent to him, as if the light-headed buzz and corruption of his lungs was his destiny. His fresh air, his removal of the weight on his shoulders. Whenever the death inside of his body, the memories and flashes needed a release, *this* was how.

As Wilbur took another long drag of his cigarette, he sunk deeper into his own pit of denial.

The hot ash burning the sides of his fingers stopped him from sinking too deep, too deep for safe retrieval. Though, that was the question. Did he want to be retrieved? Saved, even?

He drove his younger brother of two lives away. First Tommy Soot, now Tommy Idelle. Just like W. Soot, Wilbur was a fucking monster.

The garden at this hour didn't help the bleakness in his head. He sat on the stone patio, the slamming of the front door from Tommy still a fresh wound.

His hand hovered over the call contact button on his phone screen, the unconscious part of him shouting for the movement. If he was alone for any longer, he would do far worse than smoke a simple addictive.

He winced as another spec of hot ash flared his skin. His finger pressed onto the button by accident.

Wilbur sighed and held the phone to his ear. There was no point in stopping the call.

"What do you want, Wilbur? I'm driving right now." If relief could be a person, it would be Techno. From his voice alone, the shadows ahead of him in the garden dissipated.

"Techno," he faltered into the phone. His throat was wrecked from the shouting match earlier and the many tears that followed.

He could hear the change of Techno's demeanour over the line. "What's wrong?"

There was a silence and the shadows grew.

“I’m almost home right now.”

The black in the garden faded to an even darker colour. There was a single torch on a wall, chests surrounded him, mud encased the ceiling. A small, scared boy shook in front of him, his shoulders quivering and face painted with scrapes and blood.

The man—*Wilbur*—stepped closer to this poor, frail boy. His cackles echoed the broken walls that insulated no heat and instead housed a breeding ground for the cold air and biting winds.

“They’re lying to us! Tobias? He’s lying to you, man,” the person in Wilbur’s body hounded onto the boy. As the torchlight flickered, blue eyes and blonde hair shined in the dark. It was Tommy. *“He would- he would drop us at the second he realises we’re not in the lead anymore—”*

“No, no! Stop it!” Tommy shouted. Yet the man wasn’t perturbed by the horror in the young boy’s eyes. The swarming doubts dulling the blue seemed to push the man on.

This was W. Soot, this was *him*. Tommy’s older brother, the man who would pick up the boy as a baby and bounce on his hip when Tommy took his first steps towards *him*. Not towards his father, but to him.

Yet now, *this* W. Soot stared at Tommy as if he were about to be stabbed in the back by his own blood. Paranoia crippled his once caring soul and twisted every attachment he once loved to hold close.

Water drenched him, soaking through his sweater and dousing his skin. The scent of fire was too close for it to be from the torch—

“Wilbur, what the hell?”

Techno placed down the water hose and rubbed at the scorch marks on Wilbur’s clothes. He was back in the garden with a burnt hole in his jeans. He must’ve dropped his cigarette.

His exposed skin stung, but he didn’t feel the pain, too enrapt on the fear that he caused in Tommy’s eyes. It didn’t matter if that wasn’t his Tommy or if he didn’t remember being W. Soot because it was still *him*.

He couldn’t ignore it anymore, he couldn’t deny it. Tommy was right.

But he shouldn’t be right. He *can’t* be. Because that would mean he was—

Wilbur was a terrorist who killed his own people, blew up his unfinished symphony and abused his baby brother as lunacy and all the betrayals he faced took their toll. He never wanted to hurt Tommy yet here he was with the shadows of the garden displaying his deepest regrets.

He didn’t want it to be real.

Techno pulled him up from where he sat on the patio and pushed him back inside. He shivered as the ventilated air hit him. A towel landed on his lap and he rushed to hug it around his body.

“What’s up with you?” Techno asked, eyeing the hole in Wilbur’s jeans and stained ash in between his fingers. “You- you didn’t even realise it was burning you.”

Wilbur gripped tighter on the towel, not liking the concern dripping from Techno’s voice.

“Do you know remember what I told you yesterday about me seeing things?” was all Wilbur needed to say for the dead-pan look to leave Techno’s face and urgency to take its place.

“Yeah, it’s getting worse.”

Techno moved to sit on the floor in front of Wilbur and handed him a hairband.

He twisted it in his hands and frowned down at the man. “What?”

Huffing, Techno gestured to his dyed hair. “It used to calm you down when we were kids.”

If the circumstances were different and a ghost’s carefree and transparent laughter wasn’t echoing throughout his ears, then Wilbur would’ve laughed. He braided Techno’s hair for the first time when he was sixteen years old, not a *kid*. But he more acted like one compared to his final months aged sixteen—when the woman who should’ve been at his secondary school graduation died on that hospital bed.

He stopped braiding Techno’s hair after that day. Long hair reminded him of something he lost, something he shouldn’t mourn when he was just a child.

Yet now, as he threaded his fingers through the dyed pink strands and fastened a braid, the pounding in his head calmed. The ghost’s laughter dulled.

As he gazed at the finished result, his fingers no longer busy, the tremors in his hands returned. Techno shrugged the braid past his shoulder and sat down next to him on the sofa. The same sofa his conversation with Tommy had started, the same place he had betrayed his trust and said such awful fucking things that he didn’t even *mean*.

Not even the smallest bit of him believed the words he shouted at the one who was nothing but kind to him. Tommy was the one who convinced him to go to therapy, who opened up that bridge he needed to talk and even think about his mother again. He felt *understood* with him. And just like with everything, Wilbur decided to ruin it all.

“Techno, I fucked up,” he said. “I fucked up so badly.”

Techno frowned and looked closer at him, the dried tear tracks on his face, the festering darkness in his eyes, the shaking in his shoulders.

“Where’s Tommy?” Techno asked.

Wilbur screwed his eyes shut, a whimper left his lips. “He can’t be right,” he whispered, voice strained. “He *can’t* be.”

“What did you do?”

“He- he couldn’t have expected me to believe that shit Techno it’s—” It was true. It was real but God, he needed to avoid it, “—it’s bullshit.”

“Wilbur, what did you do?” Techno repeated, sterner than before. Soft eyes hardened, no longer looking at someone he had sworn to protect and defend the minute the younger boy broke down in his arms on the way to the funeral.

“I made Tommy run away,” he admitted, his heart constricted at the words he never wanted to say. “He told me something and it sounds- it sounds fucking *insane*, and the things he said...”

His eyes fogged and sulphur attacked his nose.

There were fireworks. Cries of agony and pain. He held Tommy in his arms, pulling the boy back as he tried to get free. Tommy screamed at him to let him go so he could save his friend. But Wilbur held him tighter. Tobias wasn’t worth the risk of his little brother.

“Wilbur!”

He blinked and Techno wiped his tears away as the scene faded.

“I’m going to need you to tell me what Tommy said,” Techno demanded, serious. “Wilbur, did he mention a curse?”

His face paled. The tremors in his hands soared. “How do you know about that?”

“That doesn’t matter right now, what did he say—?”

“No, no, how do you know about the curse?”

“Will!” he shouted, gripping onto his shoulders. “What else did he say?”

“He- he said the curse was going to kill him on his birthday and that I was cursed as well—” he stuttered out.

Techno’s head recoiled. Confusion and anger roamed his face. His lip curled into a snarl. “Tommy told you he had one day left to live and you let him *leave*?”

His stomach dropped. Fuck, Tommy had one day. It was his birthday tomorrow and he had *one* fucking day.

Wilbur flinched as more tears streamed down his face. He so desperately wanted to sink into denial again, for this reality to disappear. He didn’t want to be the cause of Tommy’s death, the reason why the person he loved like a younger brother died thinking he was all alone with no one there who cared about him. Tommy would die abandoned because of *him*. Because of Wilbur’s stupid inability to face up to his own problems and admit that there was something wrong with him—that these things he was seeing weren’t hallucinations but were memories, flashbacks.

The person who lifted Wilbur out of the grave he dug for himself was going to die.

“Do you know where he is?” Techno asked, his voice still raised and face coated in anger.

He shook his head, yearning for the throbbing in his skull to return so he didn’t have to think about this. His brother- his baby brother that he failed in his first life would die a second time. All because of him.

As Wilbur collapsed in on himself, Techno grabbed his phone from his pocket and pressed it against his ear.

“Who are you calling?” he croaked out, shivering again, but not from the cold.

“Tommy,” Techno grunted, scowling at him. “We need to find him.”

Techno sighed violently as his fourth attempt at calling Tommy failed. He pocketed his phone and clenched his hands into fists. His gaze hounded back on Wilbur.

“Wilbur, I swear to God, if he’s already dead—” he stopped himself.

“Finish your sentence,” Wilbur snapped. “Say it.”

Techno’s lips thinned.

“Say it!” he yelled. “I fucking know you want to. Do you not think I share the same thoughts, Technoblade?”

“I’m not saying it,” Techno resigned.

He pushed at Techno’s chest, tears stinging his eyes. “Fucking say it, you coward.”

“Wilbur,” he warned. Though the anger had drained from his voice and fists were unclenched, there was still a flame in his eyes. He wouldn’t take Wilbur’s shit if he carried on.

“You’re thinking it though, aren’t you?” he continued, desperate for the confrontation in his mind to become a reality. “That this is all my fault and Tommy’s going to die because of—”

“Don’t finish that,” he ordered with a threatening tone yet it was for Wilbur’s own sake.

“You know it’s true.”

Techno gripped Wilbur’s hands and shoved them back to his side but kept them in his grasp. “Don’t force your self-pity on me.” His grip remained tight as Wilbur fought against it. “Don’t make this about yourself right now because Tommy is out there, alone and upset, in the dead of the night. We need to find him.”

Wilbur sniffed and hugged his arms around himself. The fight left his cold body and timid acceptance—something so close to withdrawal and departure—replaced the empty slot.

The door pushed open and both of them ran towards it, hoping for a certain blonde boy to be there on the other side. Yet, it was only Phil carrying in shopping bags.

Phil frowned at Wilbur's wrecked appearance and placed the bags on the table.

"What's wrong?" he asked, securing the towel around Wilbur's shoulders. His teeth chattered.

Both Wilbur and Techno glanced at each other, their eyes engaged in a silent conversation only the two understood.

"We need to talk," Techno said, solemn and firm.

As he processed whatever the *fuck* he was just told, Phil directed them both back into the living room.

To put it in the simplest words, Phil was distressed.

His newest son, his youngest, was missing and destined to die at midnight. And he had no fucking idea what to do with that information. He couldn't cry or show his distress—at least not in front of Wilbur and Techno—and even then, he was so *tired* of grieving.

It didn't help that Wilbur looked seconds away from breaking down again after hearing Techno's explanation.

He didn't know what to do. He wasn't an expert on Greek mythology or finding missing children. He wasn't fit to be a single father. Kristin was supposed to be here to help deal with this, to be by his side as they consoled their troubled sons and figure it all out. He can't do this alone.

The moment that young boy wearing a ratted t-shirt and worn-in jeans showed up at his door with a face full of dare and mischief, Phil knew he was his—that Tommy was one of them. But that once lively face breathed in the night winds, *somewhere* outside, lost in a world that fated his death.

He needed to find him.

Techno returned from the upstairs with a ragged book in his hands. The same notebook Phil occasionally saw underneath Tommy's pillows when he changed his bedsheets.

"Niki has told me before that everyone who's cursed has an item that survives their rebirth. This might be Tommy's," Techno explained as he seated himself down on the sofa.

That was another thing Phil needed to wrap his head around. Niki was cursed as well. He didn't get how either of them could keep this burden to themselves and survive years of different lives, memories and personalities, without a piece of them dying each time. They were so young, too young to be having to deal with any of this.

Phil moved closer to look over his shoulder. Tommy's rushed writing accompanied every page, each with symbols in the right corner of the page. "It looks like he treated it like a diary."

The two flicked through the notebook. The violent crossing out in black ink worried him, Tommy's irritation bled onto the page. The columns of unanswered myth theories, the paragraphs of analysis and detailed events in his current life overwhelmed Phil.

No child should have to do this just to survive.

Techno stopped at the page with the written message from W. Soot. Both of them glanced over at Wilbur, who was now asleep on the arm of the sofa.

He didn't know what to do with that. He wasn't that well versed with the history of Snowchester and L'Manberg; he barely remembered secondary school and blanked out most of it. But he knew that W. Soot at the end of it all wasn't the best man—in terms of his own actions and mental health.

Frankly, it frightened Phil that such memories were inside the head of his son. He remembered when Wilbur was a carefree child, how he would force Kristin to take him to the zoo the next town over so he could add more reasons into his little notepad about why anteaters were the worst animal to exist. It was an eccentric list that Phil pinned to the fridge until Wilbur took it down in embarrassment aged twelve.

Those were the years before it all went to shit and he finally understood the burden, the pain of being a single parent. But at least he had Techno's support.

As Techno continued to go through the notebook, Phil eyed the very noticeable space on the sofa that normally fit four people.

Tommy.

He needed to find him and he would—even if it was the last thing he'd ever do.

Techno sat up straighter, glaring down at his phone with newfound panic. "Niki texted me back," he announced. "Tommy was at her house but he's not there anymore."

His grip on the steering wheel harshened, the rising sun on the horizon taunted him. It was barely four o'clock in the morning yet the sun peaked over his dashboard. Not letting himself be disturbed by nature's ways, Phil drove faster.

"Where would he be?" he asked Techno in the front seat.

“Niki’s checking the café but she suggested another place,” Techno said as he put the location into Phil’s phone. “Drive there.”

The place they stopped at didn’t ease the hammering of Phil’s heart nor his forming headache. The seawall laid in front of them, next to a lonely bench.

It was windy. The breeze struck harsher than usual, strong enough to push an unsteady man.

Tommy stood high on the seawall edge. His feet trod lightly along the stone, his steps careless.

A breath lodged in Phil’s throat as the boy he saw as his own son stagger. He was dangerously close to falling. But Tommy didn’t seem to care.

He walked forward, shrugging off Techno’s shoulder touch as he exited the car. He shouldn’t startle Tommy, but he couldn’t just sit there helplessly from the car when one rough gust of wind could send the boy tumbling down to the shallow waters.

“Tommy?” he called out, trying not to alarm him. Yet, the wind swallowed his voice. Tommy kept his head set straight, gazing into the sun rising in the clouds of orange and soft pinks.

Phil moved closer and called out his name again. Tommy turned his head, his eyes as red as the sunrise and tired as the disappearing moon.

He was a bad father for not doing anything before. He knew Tommy wasn’t like other foster kids, that he had been beaten down until no recovery yet there was still life in his eyes, clinging onto a dying flame of hope. He should’ve kindled that flame sooner.

“I don’t know what I am, Phil,” Tommy shuddered, his tone flat. Unlike the months before, there was no desire in his voice. It was hollow. “I keep thinking... what if I’m Theseus again?”

Tommy swayed over the edge.

“Wouldn’t it just be better for me to already seal my fate? Fall for the second time? I don’t need anyone to push me this time.”

Phil’s hand cradled the stone seawall as he peered up at Tommy, concern and care in his glassy eyes. If he made one wrong move, if he grabbed Tommy at the wrong time, he would fall.

Techno had explained that usually, the curse meant that you couldn’t die to any circumstance besides the rebirth, but he didn’t want to risk it.

He stared at the boy who doubted every piece of love that was thrown at him and tightly smiled. “Tommy, I want you to know that I believe you,” Phil said.

The other stumbled, his words surprising him.

Tommy's head lowered. "Do you really? Or do you still think that this is me having *dreams* again?"

Guilt resided in Phil's face, his shoulders sagged. Even though he knew his initial reaction to Tommy's nightmares and screams of Wilbur being a murderer were valid—appropriate even—it didn't help that the product of his own words resided in front of him.

One of his own was so *certain* that no one else in his family would believe him stood staggering over the edge.

It was partly his fault. *He* reduced Tommy's fears and fights with Wilbur to just him acting out, that it was a problem he could figure out himself with his therapist's help. But that wasn't the case.

Phil opened his mouth to say anything, yet Tommy spoke first.

"You don't have to explain yourself or apologise, Phil. I'm not the best at this either."

He sighed, his heart clenched. There wasn't a selfish bone in this boy's body—even when Phil had hurt him, whether intentionally or not, Tommy went out of his way to make *him* feel better.

"No. No, I should," he protested. "It's my job to make sure you're safe and listened to in my house, it's the simplest thing and I fucked it up." His fists curled on the stone seawall. "I let you down."

Something flickered across Tommy's face, something Phil had never seen before but he wanted it to stay. It brightened his dull eyes for just a moment, relaxed his tense shoulders and stopped the shaking in his arms.

It was hope.

Though that same hope died shortly after another gust of wind blew against his body and reminded him of his fate.

Tommy smiled sadly at Phil, his arms embracing the cold and moving breeze. "You did your best, and if it means anything, you're the best father I've ever had."

Phil's chest pounded. He wasn't cut out to deal with *this*.

"Tommy, can you get down for me please?" he begged, his voice trembled.

A moment passed where neither of them moved. Tommy's eyes stayed fixated on the morning sun. A deep exhale rattled his posture and he stepped down.

Phil rushed to hug him close to his chest. "You little shit," his words were sharp yet endearing.

"I want you to know that over every life I've lived, I've never felt this happy in these six months," Tommy whispered. "I just wish I could've had longer with you."

“You will,” Phil replied, not allowing his fears seep into his voice. He carded his fingers through Tommy’s hair. He wouldn’t describe the feeling flowing through him as relief because even with him in his arms, it still wasn’t okay.

“It’s okay, Phil,” Tommy murmured, leaning into his hand.

“No, no it’s not,” he choked. He clutched him closer as more wind bit at their thin clothes.

He wanted the world for Tommy yet he only had hours. It wasn’t fair. None of this was fair.

“Is now a good time to say the engine in the car is still running or...?” Techno interrupted.

“Technoblade I swear to God,” Phil huffed.

Tommy stilled in his arms and let go. He stared at Techno, frowning as if he had just remembered something.

“Why did Niki want me to tell you first?” he asked, his arm still interlinked with Phil’s.

Techno walked forward to the seawall. “Who’d you think helped her figure out her recent myth?” he tilted his head with a grin. “Daphne was an easy one to guess.”

“So you knew from the start,” Tommy said, his gaze indifferent. “You knew all along that I was cursed.”

There was a hint of disdain in his voice. But there was no bite to his tone, just a muffled sadness.

“I knew the second I saw your tattoo,” Techno explained. He fiddled with his hands as he spoke, almost as if he realised the hurt Tommy felt from his secret-keeping.

Tommy stayed silent for a minute, relishing in his array of emotions and thoughts—things Phil couldn’t interpret. The situation was complex, he must admit, since it meant someone would’ve always believed Tommy, if he told Techno first, then this wouldn’t have happened. No unleashed tears, no jarring words, no abandonment nor betrayal. Just acceptance and support.

But Greek myths couldn’t survive without a few misunderstandings.

Techno cleared his throat. “I just thought you had until you were twenty-one, like Niki, but obviously not.”

“Yeah, I was pretty let down in the adult death department,” Tommy agreed, sparking a laugh from Techno.

Phil rubbed his forehead. The two continued to stare at each other, captured in a silent conversation he had only seen Techno and Wilbur be able to sustain. Though, he was mistaken with how neither of them needed to speak to understand their bearings. Techno wanted to wait for Tommy to come to him for help whilst Tommy never liked admitting for his need for it—the two were at a stalemate.

Techno reached over and clasped his hand over Tommy's shoulder, glad the other didn't flinch at the touch. "Get in the car so I can guess your myth, Tommy."

A small smile reached Tommy's lips, a subtle and hesitant one. Techno squeezed his shoulder and the expression steadied.

Phil trailed after them back into the car with one mission on his mind. He would save his son. He couldn't lose someone else he loved. He won't.

Once they arrived home, Tommy stayed by Phil's side as Techno volunteered to wake Wilbur up.

As the man blearily opened his eyes and sat up, Tommy froze. He was scared of the same person who once provided him with the most safety, the one he thought understood and loved him. The words Wilbur had casually hissed at him, the daunting phrases that followed him everywhere in this life, wouldn't leave his head.

He was a liar, a problem no one wanted, someone who shouldn't be trusted. A waste of time no foster family could deal with.

Tommy thought this house would be different, and despite the comforting hug from Phil and support from Techno, the waking man on the sofa destroyed it all.

At least watching Wilbur be kicked awake amused him.

Unease swelled through him as consciousness resided in Wilbur. It hurt less when he was asleep.

"Alright, let's play 'Guess Who' then," Techno announced with a clap of his hands.

He rolled his eyes but appreciated the use of humour during this time—if everyone in this household stared at him as if he were a broken being then he would fucking lose it. He kept avoiding Wilbur's eye as he told Techno the pages in his notebook that talked about his current life events.

He sought no need for confirmation in what swam in those brown eyes, whether it was guilt or still the same disgust that glared at him as Wilbur held him against the wall hours earlier.

Yet, the look he received from Phil was no better. A remorseful glow of deep regret—he preferred the normalcy Techno offered.

"Tommy, I'm going to need more than that," Techno said after Tommy explained his first major fostering home, the adulterous family vloggers who exploited children. "Even you

acknowledge in your notebook that the themes of child death and betrayal are popular and generic themes in Greek myths.”

His tattoo began to burn. The mark of Zagreus seemed to blacken even darker.

He sighed and rubbed his wrist. “I know! Techno, I know.”

Phil placed his arm around him and Tommy stopped himself from shrugging off the touch. Phil needed it more than him.

He shut his eyes for a moment, trying to ignore the pain.

“What about the void? Do you have notes on that?” Techno asked, oblivious to Tommy’s agony.

“It’s one of the beginning pages. I have an entire file of every Dream visit,” he explained, his teeth gritted.

“Dream visits?” someone asked, the voices merged, he couldn’t tell the difference. “Like in your dreams or?”

“No, like Dream, capital D, he’s- he’s the guy who cursed us all,” he spat out. “Zagreus.”

The pain spiked at his name. His surroundings muffled, combining sounds with sights, and every shape dripped to the floor. He screwed his eyes shut, gripping at his wrist.

“Tommy?”

It was all too much. The loamy air, the heat from the kitchen, the stares from everyone around him that he could just *feel* without even seeing, even the tightness of his thin clothing. He couldn’t handle this.

He wasn’t cut out for this. He shouldn’t have to witness his family each deal with their own reactions to his upcoming death, with Wilbur’s probable self-deprecation and guilt, Phil’s savouring touches and unbearable pity, and Techno’s endless questions and pestering. Their stages of foreboding grief.

“Shut the fuck up,” he seethed, eyes locked to the sinking floor. He couldn’t even hear himself.

He bit on his tongue, iron tasted in his mouth and someone picked him up.

“Get the hell off me,” he shouted, scratching at the hands. Everything was just so *sensitive*. Every patch of his skin stung. “Get off! Get off me!”

The hands dragged him upstairs, not deterred by his kicks and clawing. They placed him down on a soft surface.

The walls were a blank colour, mounted with bookcases. He was in Techno’s room.

As he gripped at his wrist, the throbbing ceased. His eyes could blink without the shapes blending into different ones.

Techno shoved a glass of water into his lap. He stared down at the mug. The scene was weirdly familiar and probably was because this had happened before with Techno separating him from the environment that overwhelmed him and calming him down in his room. Just like that one night with Wilbur and Phil in the garden, all those months ago.

He sipped on the water, it soothing his dry mouth.

“I would offer for you to watch me play Bedwars but I don’t think we can do that this time,” Techno said, his voice quieter than before at the dining table.

Tommy cleared his throat. “I think it’s appropriate for you to continue your Bedwars streak whilst I’m on my deathbed.”

“I can easily take back my favourite mug.”

“No, it’s mine.”

Techno shook his head with a grin. Tommy grabbed Steve the polar bear plushie from his bed and rested it in his lap, only for Techno to reach forward and snatch it off him. “You can’t have him.”

“You dare deny the wishes of a dying child?” he joked, though it brought back the cruel reminder.

Techno fiddled with Steve’s ears, the fluffy texture calming him.

“You’re not going to die, Tommy,” he began, earnestly. “We have until midnight and I’m a fast reader with your notebook. You said you’ve put in details about your Dream visits, so maybe that’s involved in your myth.”

He nodded, still glaring at the polar bear in Techno’s arms. The other sighed and threw it at him.

“Thank you,” Tommy mumbled, hugging the polar bear close, “for everything.”

He didn’t want to leave. Not yet.

“Thank me when I save you,” Techno said.

A knock came from the door and Phil entered the room, hesitancy written all over him.

“You two doing alright?” he asked and they nodded.

Techno patted both Steve and Tommy before opening the door. “I’ll be in your office, Phil.”

Phil replaced where Techno sat before and stared at Tommy, uncertain, with his hands clasped together. It looked like he was psyching himself up to speak, so Tommy stayed quiet.

“We’ve—” his speech faltered and he sighed. “We’ve got Techno going through your notebook, okay? He’ll figure it out. You’ll get to blow out those candles on that stupid cake I ordered last week. You’ll be sixteen in this life Tommy, for more than a second.”

“I hope so,” he replied. “Wait, you got me a cake?”

“Of course I did.”

“What kind?”

“A ‘Marvel’ cake,” Phil answered with a half-hearted smile.

Tommy chuckled into the polar bear. “Was that to spite Wilbur?”

“Partly,” he admitted. “Wilbur’s still downstairs if you want to speak to him.”

Tommy was unsure if he wanted to. A conversation with the person who practically sent him away and almost made him jump from that seawall was not one he longed for.

But he needed to. Today was not a time to avoid things because... because there wasn’t much time left.

He reluctantly got up from Techno’s bed and nestled Steve back into his normal place by the pillows.

“Fine, but if he says any other shit he said earlier, I’m going to deck him,” he said.

“Permission granted.”

The walk downstairs was pitiful. He slowly trod on each step, scouting out where the creaks normally came from so his journey continued in silence. He wouldn’t say he was delaying this conversation, but he one-hundred percent was.

He sat down in the living room on the other end of the sofa from Wilbur. The man had one of the fact files of possible Greek myths he could be in his hands. Perseus laid in his touch. Ironic.

The denial of a happy ending held it in his grip.

Wilbur looked up from the paper, his eyes weren’t tainted by anger or disgust as he imagined. But with levels of guilt he couldn’t digest—swirls of regret, shame and remorse mixed in blends of brown. His eyebrows were downturned, conflicted. Tear tracks stained his face.

“If the words ‘I’m sorry’ leave your mouth, I’m punching you,” Tommy said lowly. He’d had enough apologies for today, enough considerate speeches and insufferable goodbyes.

“I am, though,” Wilbur whimpered. There was nothing in his voice that spoke *Wilbur* to him—it was vacant and dead. The shell of a person sat beside him, no longer living inside of it.

“Punch me then, I deserve it.”

“Oh enough with this fucking sad boy hours bullshit, Wilbur,” he scorned, glaring at him. He exhaled and tried to relax his shoulders. He didn’t come here for a fight. He needed answers. “Did you mean it?” Wilbur frowned at him. “What you said earlier... did you mean it?”

With his back hunched, more shame seeped into his face. His bottom lip trembled as he shook his head. “I didn’t mean it, Tommy. Any of it, you—” he stopped himself and moved closer, their shoulders partially touched. For a moment, adoration took into his eyes as he stared at Tommy. “You are the best thing that has ever happened to me, Tommy. You broke down my walls, you tried to help me when I forced everyone else to give up on me.”

Tommy’s chest constricted.

“I trust you and I always have, nothing will break that trust,” Wilbur whispered. “I love you, okay? Nothing will change that.”

As his words mended the hurtful phrases that kept resonating in Tommy’s mind, he surged forward and wrapped his arms around his brother.

His *brother*.

He didn’t care anymore. He didn’t care that this was W. Soot, that Wilbur had hurt him so many times and not only in this life but in two of them. Because the Wilbur in front of him, the man in his arms and crying into his shoulder, was better. He was light, the sun, everything Tommy envied and treasured. His voice could send him to sleep on a restless night, his laughter could brighten up any room, their little jokes back and forth improved his mood no matter the circumstances. This was Wilbur.

He gripped tightly at Wilbur’s shoulders, his ears brushing past them, as he tried to drown out his own guilt. Wilbur wasn’t the only one to say something hurtful that night.

“I didn’t mean it, please I didn’t mean it,” he sobbed into his neck, searching for the warmth that Wilbur always radiated.

“Mean what?”

“You’re not the reason your little brother dies for a second time,” he recited, sorrow bleeding into his voice. “You- you may be W. Soot but I—” his throat closed up as tears streamed down his face.

“Toms...” Wilbur whispered kindly, his thumb stroking Tommy’s back. “I don’t know the extent to what he did to you- to what I did to you, but I swear, I won’t fail you now.”

He relished in his comfort, wanting nothing more than to be closer to him, even if it wasn’t possible.

“Do you remember?” he hesitated to ask.

“Bits and pieces.” Wilbur brushed the wisps of hair off Tommy’s forehead. “Do you remember how you used to sing to the flowers in the garden to help them grow?” A breathless chuckle sweetened the air. “I put fertiliser in the yellow roses and you were *convinced* the new growth was because of your singing. I didn’t have the heart at the time to correct you.”

Tommy giggled. “What about the drug van?”

“It was never a drug van!” he exclaimed, laughing with him.

Reminiscing on the days before wars and heartbreak were bittersweet but necessary. Those were times where brotherhood wasn’t corrupted and youth—innocence—still lingered. No need for soldiers or swords attached to their sides. Just a splintered family trying their best with what they had.

But, just with everything good in Tommy’s life, the moment had to be ruined.

The pain in his wrist returned, yet it spread to the rest of his body before he could even look down at the tattoo. He crumbled over, recognising such soreness and discomfort. But this—this was too soon. It shouldn’t be happening yet.

He broke away from Wilbur’s arms, whimpers tumbling out of his mouth as aching bore into his skin and boiled his insides.

“Tommy?” Wilbur said, worried.

He jumped up from the sofa and ran into the kitchen. He picked up the knife from the counter.

Tommy needed to know if *this* was the reason why, if the pain was because of that.

Without hesitation, he cut into his hand and gold blood poured out of the wound. Dread settled deep into his boiling stomach. Wilbur sped into the kitchen and gasped at the sight.

He crumbled to the floor, the knife rattled beside him. Wilbur rushed to hold him, not letting his head hit the hard surface.

“What- what does that mean?” he asked, panicked. “Why, why the fuck are you bleeding gold?”

Tommy bit down on his cheek, squirming as the blood dripped onto the floor and mixed with pigments of red and gold. “It’s too soon for this. I don’t know why—” his breathing quickened, his chest pounded too loudly for him to even *think*.

He caught the time on the clock. It was five to seven in the morning, not even close to midnight.

“Wilbur,” he croaked out. “I don’t have much time left.”

His hands shook as he cradled Tommy to his chest. “If you fucking leave me, I swear to God —” he sniffed and cries wrecked his throat. “Please don’t leave me,” he whispered as he kissed his forehead.

“I don’t understand, I should have longer,” he muttered, his voice frail. His blood heated under his skin, burning every nerve in his body. His lungs caved in on themselves, making it harder to speak.

“Dad!” Wilbur screamed out. “Dad! Techno, get in here!”

“It’s okay,” he faltered, his lips trembling and drenched in blood.

It was okay. Six months made up for a lifetime of loneliness and isolation. Moments with Techno and Phil watching shows they loved, the concerts Wilbur performed in his bedroom, the meals at the dinner table filled with back-and-forth laughter. Annoying Ranboo in science classes and teasing Tubbo in music, it was all worth it. He could never replace them.

All he wanted was a family and they were his.

Wilbur sobbed, “No! None of this is *fucking* okay. You’re supposed to live, Tommy, I don’t want you to die.” His chest heaved. “Please don’t die on me.”

His bloodied lips twisted to a sad smile. “I don’t think I have a choice in that and I never have.”

The kitchen door burst open and two figures dashed into the room. One full of life and answers. “I figured it out! I figured it...” Techno trailed off, his voice hitched.

Both Phil and Techno fell to Tommy’s side, the notebook laid long forgotten in a pool of blood.

“Techno,” he coughed out, leaning into Phil’s hands that gripped at his face.

He was fine. He was completely fine. At least he wouldn’t die alone. Peace flushed through him, the pain disrupted by the family next to him.

“No, no, Tommy, I know what your myth is,” Techno said, strained. “Please—”

Her spoken name broke the ringing in his ears.

As a father mourned his youngest and brothers held their own, Tommy succumbed to the inevitable.

He was back there. In the void. No maze walls adorned with vines, no ships cast upon the sea, no islands at his reach. It was black. Empty.

Dream stood in front of him, his face open with misery and despair.

This time, unlike the first in this life, the unmasked man didn't smile. Instead, he cried.

"You were Ariadne."

Chapter End Notes

...

this ain't the last chapters dw

uh anyway

I wanted to explain why his myth is Ariadne and lowkey what the myth is (since some people might not be well versed with Greek mythology, or even hers).

So Ariadne was a Cretan Princess, her dad Minos created the whole Labyrinth thing to keep the Minotaur locked up. She was involved in Theseus' myth with defeating the Minotaur since she gave him the thread to navigate throughout the maze (saved his life) and a sword. In exchange, he promised to marry her. After he killed the Minotaur and left for Athens, she joined him on the ship but was left, abandoned, on the island Naxos as she slept (up to interpretation with why, either bc Theseus is a lil bitch or bc Dionysus told him to since he wanted to marry her himself).

Her fate is also interpreted in many ways, I went with the one of her killing herself on the island by hanging herself or etc, but either way, she was saved by Dionysus and married him, became a goddess.

SO:

why Tommy is Ariadne?

- Tommy's first major foster family represented Minos (Ariadne's father) and the Minotaur, as the parents were unfaithful, had a violent son who needed to be locked up, and they also exploited children (Minos made Athens send a bunch of people to put into the labyrinth each year to feed the Minotaur).
- Tommy betrayed them by telling the police eventually since they broke foster care rules, just like Ariadne betrayed her father and helped Theseus.
- Wilbur (platonically here) represents Theseus since Tommy helped him with opening up about stuff, therapy, all other stuff.
- Wilbur also promised to never hurt Tommy and broke it just like Theseus did. He also abandoned Tommy.
- SBI (mainly Techno and Phil) were supposed to be Dionysus

lil clues:

- the star constellation Tommy always saw, the crowned, u-shaped one, is the Corona Borealis, aka Ariadne's crown that Dionysus gave her when they married.
- the maze (labyrinth), the ship of Theseus, the island Tommy fell asleep on with Dream, in the void.
- the Knossos Game is part of Minoan culture (Crete, Minos).
- the palace/temple Tommy woke up in the void was the Palace of Knossos, where Ariadne lived.
- the temporary tattoo Tommy got in London was the Ranunculus Butterfly; the soft pink version is called Ariadne.
- the book Dream had on the table during one visit in the Palace was called Catullus 64, which is an epic poem that writes a bit about Theseus' abandonment of Ariadne.
- also, SBI were Tommy's third major family (bio parents, vlogging parents, them) and Theseus was part of the third instalment of people sacrificed to the Minotaur.

Also, the people's theories on Odysseus and Zagreus were so fucking cool??? like, especially with the Odysseus one (it made me think I was writing the wrong myth for a sec). But ye, Ariadne

Chapter 27

The myth, her name, had left Techno's lips yet the dead boy who brought something so *special* out of his fractured family laid in front of him.

A body wouldn't be lying on the sofa right now if it wasn't for him. If he had only figured it out sooner, there would be a boy, *his* Tommy, full of all the life and happiness he deserved. No shrouded linen over his corpse, no golden blood staining his lips and clothes. Instead, a cheerful grin and bright, blue eyes. A younger brother who tried his best to fix the family that wanted him just as much as he did.

Tommy hadn't seen Techno cry before, but with his eyes forever closed shut, he never would.

A shadow loomed over a mourning family yet unlike all fights Techno had bested in the past, this wasn't a winning battle.

The crow's feet wrinkles that normally embellished Phil's face with a moment of laughter now ceased downturned, no light garnished those eyes; Wilbur not moving from the kitchen floor, frozen in place despite having no body to hold anymore; the guilt that shredded every piece of Techno that wanted to continue another day knowing that the room to his right would be empty from now on.

None of this spoke of victory. None of this displayed strength, that this was something they would get over *together* as a family, just like with Kristin.

No family should have to grieve a mere child, a younger brother, a son.

His shaking hand gripped on the linen concealing his body and he covered Tommy's face. He couldn't bear to gaze upon the person he failed. Techno had *promised*, stated with so much confidence that he would figure this out, but he was too fucking late.

It was so easy to love him, to treasure his boisterous laughter and arrogant quips, the half-hearted jokes and honest smiles. Everything about Tommy destined him for greatness, yet nature's grasp took hold of that potential and set its sail for Naxos. The resting place of the wronged and abandoned.

He should've told Tommy sooner, the minute he saw that Zagreus tattoo, he should've said *something*. Lifted the weight from his shoulders and ease his burden. But he didn't. He left Tommy in the dark, living in a household that he wasn't sure would accept him, alone and scared.

Wilbur wasn't the only Theseus in his house.

"Do we bury the body?" Phil whispered from beside him. He had never heard such resignation in his voice before.

Niki, who had been quiet since she cleaned the kitchen floor from blood and thrown over the shrouded linen, cleared her throat. “His body will burn to ashes later today,” she began, wistful, “in preparation for rebirth.”

Her words formed a lodge in Techno’s throat, his breathing stalled. Phil failed to keep his distress to himself. He tried to stay strong, not for himself but for Phil, yet it was so *hard*. The person least deserving of death fell victim to the fate Techno could have prevented.

How was he supposed to stomach his pain and bury his grief when they couldn’t even bury *him*?

He recognised Phil's pain. From what Phil knew, Kristin would stay alone in death, with her neighbouring graves forever empty. No body of a boy who was as much as a member of the Crafts as Kristin was accompanying it.

“Are Tubbo and Ranboo on their way?” Phil asked, yet it sounded more like he didn’t want to know the answer.

With the grim look painting Niki’s face and her hesitant nod, Techno understood. No one here wanted to witness two teenagers grieve their best friend. He didn’t want to be here for that—for any of this. He wished to just go back to bed, sleep the day off and wake up to hearing Tommy stumbling about in his room at eleven o’clock, him taking up all the hot water with his hour-long shower and lessen Techno’s fatigue with his jokes at the breakfast table. He wanted Tommy to be back, for it all to be fine.

But it didn’t work out like that.

Niki removed the creases from the sheet covering Tommy with steady hands.

From all the year's Techno had known Niki, she hadn’t mourned in front of him before. He had seen her cry since he was one of the people she turned to when she needed comfort and he offered any words she needed to hear or any ice cream she desired. But the demeanour of his best friend frightened him. There were tears in her eyes yet no pain rendered in her face. Almost as if the emotions were regarded yet denied.

“You haven’t said much since you got here,” Techno said, his shoulders gently brushing against hers, hoping that the subtle touch grounded her like it normally did.

“I should be used to this,” she whispered with her arms hugged around herself. “I should be... I should be fine. I’ve experienced this before, I’ve been on the receiving end in that void, but I’m—” she trailed off and tugged on the bracelet around her right wrist. The one Tommy got her for Christmas.

“Just because you’re used to this cycle of death doesn’t mean it won’t affect you each time,” Techno consoled.

She sighed and shook her head. “It took him too soon.”

Techno stilled.

“You didn’t notice?” she asked, looking up at him. “Tommy died at seven o’clock in the morning, Techno. That’s not the normal time.”

His stomach dropped. It hadn’t crossed his mind at the irregularity of his death. He was supposed to have until midnight.

“What does that mean for him in the afterlife?” Techno asked, eyebrows furrowed.

“I don’t know,” she muttered, “and that scares me.”

“He’s strong,” Techno stated, confident for the first time today ever since his family turned from four to three in a matter of seconds. “He’ll get through this.”

There was willpower in Tommy’s smile, fight in his spirit and resilience in his nature. Even after every life, every cackle from Zagreus and every smirk from Fate, his humanity remained. Despite what the world threw at him and slashed at his body, the kindness inside of him survived. Transgressed the matter of time and fields of life. There was nothing that boy couldn’t do and Techno will never stop admiring him for it.

“But what about us?” Niki asked, distraught all of a sudden. “Will we get through this?”

He didn’t know.

Techno was desperate to reach a point after today where it didn’t crush his heart to think of Tommy. He wanted to smile whenever memories of the blonde crossed his mind, like how he purposely annoyed Techno whenever they watched one of his favourite anime shows downstairs. He yearned to laugh as he recalled the light-hearted fights between Tommy and Wilbur over the dinner table and cry happy tears instead of ones doused in sadness over a premature and undeserving death.

But a day like that was far from now.

He squeezed Niki’s shoulder gently, giving her all the answers she needed in a single touch, and made his way back to the kitchen. He needed to check up on Wilbur.

Though, he regretted doing so as soon as he opened the door. Just like an hour prior, Wilbur hadn’t moved from the floor. Blood soiled his hands, the smell of Tommy tarnished his clothes, the distinct aftershave scent mixed with his strawberry shampoo. Wilbur’s hands gripped at an empty space, curled into a fist as if something was still there. Like there was a body there left to hold.

There was no denying that Tommy and Wilbur were the closest. A part of Techno always grew jealous at this—not that he would admit it. Even though he knew he had his own special connection with Tommy, one that reminded him of the crisp air on an early autumn day and specs of warm coal in a homely fireplace, he couldn’t help but be envious of their relationship.

Conflict riddled between them yet the love endured it all. A thread, just like Ariadne’s, linked the two. No matter the harsh words and fights, there would always be a mutual understanding

that they were meant to be connected. But Tommy wasn't here anymore to uphold this bond. Leaving a broken man, split in half, clutching onto the deceased.

Techno knelt next to him, hoping for the blariness in his eyes to move aside and reality to seep in. "Wilbur," he said, hovering over him. As much as it hurt to do, he needed to reel Wilbur back in, to keep him from hiding in his head.

Wilbur gave no indication that he heard him.

He didn't know what to do. He didn't know how to fix this, how to deal with his own emotions or how to handle Wilbur. It was a mess and he was stuck in the middle of it. He had never felt so incompetent before, so useless.

"Wilbur, I need you to get up," he persisted, his tongue pushing against his gritted teeth.

The man didn't move.

"Get up," he repeated, unsteady. "Wilbur, get up," his voice cracked.

The tremors in Wilbur's hands returned.

"Tell me I imagined that all," Wilbur pleaded, fragile and vulnerable, with his eyes flickering between the clean kitchen floor and blood underneath his fingernails. "Techno, please. Where is he?"

"He's gone, Will," Techno whispered.

A whine escaped Wilbur's lips, a wail only the Algea spirits, bringers of weeping and misery, could muster.

"You weren't supposed to say that," Wilbur whimpered, breaking in on himself and a piece of Techno did too.

He wasn't supposed to watch as Wilbur grieved over the boy who died in his arms—he was supposed to chuckle at Wilbur's jokes in the calm evenings and pretend he didn't notice the slightly younger man trying to seek his validation and approval with every passion he threw himself into.

Death rattled his family yet Techno could shake no more.

He looked in the fridge to get Wilbur some water but promptly shut it as he saw what was inside. The birthday cake that should be lit and cut into pieces, complementing the birthday banners stashed under the cupboard sink and gifts left tightly wrapped, laid on the top shelf.

Techno exhaled sharply, failing to control the part of him that wanted to let it all out and drop the crumbling façade of vigour and composure. He cleared his throat and buried his hands deep into his pockets.

"Come back into the living room," he said.

“You know I can’t,” Wilbur retorted, briskly.

“You can,” he continued. “It’s not something you can avoid forever.”

Wilbur’s face twisted into something inconceivable, drenched in forces Techno didn’t understand. He shuddered as the same look that bound Wilbur an hour ago began to reappear.

“I’ll be by your side,” Techno reassured, softly. “You’re not alone, Wilbur.”

From his words alone, tears brimmed in Wilbur’s eyes. But he stomached it all.

As Wilbur pushed the kitchen door open, Kirstin took the first step for him. It was his mother that Wilbur got his strength from. They all needed her right now—Tommy included, but just like with everything about her, Techno kept it to himself.

A knocking at the front door disturbed the two’s walk into the living room. Tubbo and Ranboo were here.

Neither Niki nor Phil moved to answer it, and Wilbur’s gaze from Tommy’s body hadn’t faltered, so Techno forced himself to do it for them. He needed to be strong, even if it was fake.

The expressions on Tommy’s best friends knocked any courage out of him. He wasn’t used to Ranboo without a mask on and now he wished for nothing but its return. His face screamed of anguish, shattering against the begs of holding it all in. Though, you could tell from his eyes that he wanted it all to drop, for it to be over.

Tubbo, however, was blank. No hurt curdled his eyes, no conflict resided in his body. A glazed slate awaited to be moulded by the next moments. It made him a loose thread.

It pained him to look at. The time’s Techno had seen Tommy with his friends, there was no dejection near them, it was always as if the trio propelled it outwards and didn’t let it close. Yet now, as the trio became a duo, the protection from such sorrow had died with him.

“Where is he?” Tubbo asked, stern and collected. There was an inch of hope in his tone, clawing onto the arbitrary belief that maybe the message they received from Niki was wrong. But the origins of his hope was the problem—denial sowed far more dangerous seeds than grief.

Ranboo stayed quiet. He had flowers clenched by his side, a round blossom of purple florets. Techno couldn’t remember its name.

“He’s on the sofa,” Phil croaked out at last.

Tubbo pushed past them, his shoulder knocked into Techno. Ranboo quickly followed, yet the hesitancy in his steps spoke volume.

All breathing in the room seemed to stop as Tubbo’s legs halted in front of the laying on the sofa. The motionless figure with a sheet cascaded over it, covered in shame and guilt.

A noise left the back of Tubbo's throat. His hand shook as he reached over the tug the sheet aside, to reveal the mess underneath and kill his denial. Tubbo's body froze as he gazed into the deadened stare of his former best friend, no natural blush to his cheeks, no upturned smile on those lips. Nothing but a pale canvas displaying his failures. His best friend had died without saying goodbye.

Ranboo moved forward, his eyes glassy and downcast. He gripped Tommy's hand and flinched at how cold the contact was. There was supposed to be warmth there, Tommy was supposed to squeeze his grasp and thread their fingers together like he usually did. Yet, the grip remained limp. Ranboo placed the purple flowers into Tommy's chilled palm.

With tears silently streaming down Ranboo's face, Techno remembered the flower's name.

They were alliums.

Techno couldn't bear the sight but kept his eyes set on them. He expected Tubbo to delve into sobs, for cries to strain his throat and echo the room. But, his face contorted to one of deep anger.

"Where's his bandana?" Tubbo seethed, his arm shaking as he pointed at Tommy's bare neck.

No one dared to respond. Techno didn't notice the missing accessory that Tommy never took off after that MCC. He wore it with pride and even slept with it on, but it seemed death didn't carry on this devotion.

"Where's his necklace too?" he continued, his wrath steaming. The locket Ranboo had gifted Tommy that he normally tucked into his green bandana was absent too. "Where the fuck is it?"

"They're in the wash," Wilbur mumbled.

Tubbo's slitted eyes fixed on Wilbur, a disdainful glare clouded his vision. There was power behind that stare, a motive sharpened in heartbreak and bloodied with missed opportunities.

"This is your fault," Tubbo spat, his bottom lip trembled.

Wilbur recoiled backwards.

Rather than regret seeping into Tubbo as his own words registered, the anger boiled. "If you had just- if you had believed him, he wouldn't be dead."

"Tubbo—" Niki interrupted.

"No!" he shouted, jaw clenched. "Shut up! Shut the fuck up!" cruel sobs crushed his uproar. He gestured to Wilbur, fighting to remain impassive and unaffected, yet his eyes watered. "It's all his fault, it's all his—" his voice broke over his empty words and he fell into Ranboo's arms, who held him close.

Techno stood, uncomfortable, as Tubbo sobbed into the chest of the only best friend he had left.

“Tommy didn’t let us say goodbye,” Tubbo bawled, panting as his lungs denied him air. “I didn’t say goodbye.”

Techno hated how Wilbur both detested and savoured Tubbo’s past words—the blame he desperately wanted to hear, to fuel his own self-hatred. But to hear them over Tommy’s uncovered body felt wrong.

Ranboo stared indifferently at Wilbur over Tubbo’s shoulder.

“You want to join in, Ranboo?” Wilbur taunted, immersed in his loathing. Just like earlier when he searched for the fight in Techno, it redirected to another grieving victim, housing emotions awaiting to spark.

Ranboo scoffed. “You don’t want to hear what I want to say to you,” he said, conceiving his anger. Techno moved closer to Wilbur, not anticipating such heat from Ranboo. Hit bit on his lip and held Tubbo tighter. “Tommy told us your reaction to Zagreus. How in the hell would he know that name if he wasn’t telling you the truth? Tell me, Wilbur, how could he have lied about a name you *knew*?”

Wilbur’s breath hitched. He sought wounding words and harsh bites, not *this*. “Are you blaming me for his death as well?”

“No,” Ranboo spat with narrowed eyes. “Not entirely.”

“Alright, that’s enough,” Techno interjected, clasp an arm around Wilbur before the man did something he would regret. But Wilbur took one last glance at Tommy, adorned with purple flowers and sheets dampened with his best friends’ tears, and ran up the stairs.

Techno huffed. He turned back and concealed the sight with the sheet, ignoring the protests from the others.

Tubbo opened his mouth to argue but Techno beat him to it. “You don’t want to remember him like that.”

He caught Niki’s attention and gestured towards the two hovering over the covered body. She nodded and approached them. At least they would be in good care. Without another word, he walked over to find Phil.

As he entered the kitchen, he didn’t expect Phil to be hunched over with Tommy’s notebook in his hands. It was still damp from the blood. He stayed silent whilst Phil peered down at a certain page. He got closer and the page was blank.

“If those diary entries stayed in his notebook after he... came back before, then so should this,” Phil said as he gripped the pen in his hand harder. Techno doubted the message would go through, especially as Tommy had already died, but he wouldn’t stoop as low as to take this away from Phil. He needed an outlet and this was what he chose.

Techno read over Phil’s message, the man’s cries blemishing the page, and winced. The notebook slammed against the kitchen surface.

“I can’t do this Techno,” Phil sobbed, gripping onto his short hair. “I can’t do this again.”

He would never forget Phil sitting outside of Wilbur’s door every night after Kristin’s death, delaying his own grief to deal with his declining son, who was tumbling down an unsteady slope of self-destruction, of late drunken nights out, skipping school and wasting daylight hours in his bed.

Techno sat next to him for most of it. He didn’t really grieve Kristin, not because she wasn’t technically his mother—a foster mother of a few months—but because of a different reason. One he couldn’t share, a secret he couldn’t tell either Phil or Wilbur. He owed it to her.

Yet, for Phil, helplessly watching your son ruin himself broke him. Left a scar big enough to bleed the depths of craters and canyons. But Techno thought the wound had sealed, that with Wilbur finally improving himself, it sealed. He was wrong. Seeing the life drain from your foster son’s eyes opened up that scar and let the bloodied mess fill rivers and droughts.

“I’ll handle Wilbur,” he said. He put his arm around him and let Phil relish in the comfort before letting go. “Go lie down.”

He wished the world for Phil. The person who saved him from the dark corners of foster care and adopted him yet didn’t force him to see the man as his father and instead embraced the role of a best friend. So, he needed to do this. For him.

Before he went to deal with Wilbur, he opened the notebook. He stared down at the next blank page and Ariadne circled his head. A minor myth of betrayal and abandonment. But a myth with an eventual happy ending. She was eventually saved by the God Dionysus, but where was Tommy’s escape from a tragic fate? It wasn’t fair.

He thought of Tommy’s flaming desire for a family, for open arms and a loving embrace, for his Dionysus, and wrote what needed to be said:

I hope you find what you’re looking for, whatever that is.

Tommy’s bedroom door was left ajar. Techno dreaded opening that door, knowing that Wilbur was in there. Disregarding the warnings in his head, he stepped inside.

He had only been in Tommy’s bedroom a small number of times, not enough to set press all details of it to memory, but he didn’t remember it being this... eerie.

The unmade bed, half-drunken mug on the bedside table, pyjamas from the nights before still crumpled up by the closet. Henry the cow was tucked underneath Tommy’s favourite pillow.

It looked as if a person was still living here.

Wilbur stood by the main wall, his eyes cascading down the mass amounts of drawings and printed photos stuck upon it. Most were crocked but it made it seem more homely, comfortable. There wasn’t a single photo that Tommy didn’t look happy in. Even in the polaroid picture of Tubbo strangling him in an arcade photo booth, Tommy couldn’t have

been happier. He was surrounded by his best friends, making memories and permanently documenting them.

Unlike a human life, a photograph—the moment captured in an endless time loop—couldn't die.

The detail in his bedroom that disturbed Techno the most though was the case leaning against the closet. The fencing sabre Techno had gotten Tommy for Christmas. He still treasured that afternoon of the tournament, how he had acted as if he hated the shouts and whistles from Tommy at every point and victory he achieved. But deep down, he thrived on it. Tommy's elation at the matches made all the bruises worth it. The doubts and voices swirling in his head that he would fail, that his streak would cease and failure was inevitable—it all faded as soon as Tommy clapped the loudest in the room.

He never explicitly told Tommy how grateful he was for that tournament. And now he never could.

Sniffing came from the side of the room. Techno sighed and knew where he needed to take him.

“Wilbur,” he began, gaining the other's attention, “I need you to come with me.”

“To where?” Wilbur asked, pliant and drained.

“To her.”

And with that, Wilbur understood.

The two, with their shoulders resting against each other's, peered down at their mother's gravestone. The bench felt colder than it was the last time Wilbur came here. But before there was a warm presence cuddled deep into his side with tufts of blonde hair tickling under his chin.

Techno, unlike Tommy, offered no heat to him. Just calming and cold company, a grounding one that Wilbur needed to keep his head upright. Everything served as a constant reminder of what he had lost and Wilbur had no idea how to stop it. The blue shade in the bellflowers, the soft yellow of the daises, the tough wood and freedom in the clouds. If it wasn't for Techno, the reminders would've tugged him back into the river he always found himself drowning in whenever it got too much. The icy waters that made everything so *quiet*, forgetting was better than this.

His body slacked against Techno; he was exhausted. Exhausted of this day, of himself—tired of everything. It was hours before midday yet Wilbur couldn't wait for it to be over.

“He should be next to her,” he whispered. “Tommy Craft. He should be there.”

The neighbouring grave was empty, something Kristin specially requested in her will. Tommy was always part of this family, he should be buried as one.

“He will be,” Techno promised. “In one way or another, he will be with her.”

He hummed under his breath, descending into his solacing words, hoping for it to be true.

A thought passed through his head and his dried eyes watered. This was the place he told Tommy about his music, ‘Your City Gave Me Asthma’.

“I didn’t even get to show him my album,” he blurted out. “You two were supposed to be the first to hear it.”

Techno grimaced from beside him. “He would’ve loved it.”

He could just imagine Tommy sitting by the guitar amp with his knees tucked into his chest, gazing up at him with an agape look on his face, of pure excitement and enjoyment. His head nodding along to the tune and lips mouthing the lyrics, eyes wide and attentive. Wilbur would do anything, absolutely *anything*, just to experience that.

“I know.”

Silence quivered between them and he brushed his head on Techno’s coat. They had said all the words they needed to say.

As a birthday stayed uncelebrated and the sun bled across the early morning sky, parading the graveyard with clouds Tommy would never see again, it was the tenth of April.

Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It was weird when Tommy woke up. Wilbur obviously hadn't been allowed to cook breakfast today since there was no smell coming from the kitchen—Tommy had developed a routine of leaving his door ajar so Phil yelling for him to wake up could be heard. That was weird too; he didn't know what time it was but he felt exhausted, meaning it was past midday and Phil hadn't shouted at him yet. But by that point, even Techno was awake and the fucker would burst into his room and rip Henry out of his arms just to throw it in his face.

He shouldn't still be in bed with blankets and a sheeted mattress that was colder than usual, too cold to blame it on the small breeze slipping through the suicide prevention windows.

Fingers threaded through his hair, brushing against his scalp just how Wilbur usually did. He leaned into the touch, his eyes fluttered but remained shut. A content hum rumbled his chest as Wilbur's palm cascaded down to his forehead. It brought him comfort, something he needed to ease the unfamiliarity of this morning. The bed dipped and arms wrapped around his shoulders, holding him close to Wilbur's chest.

Yet, the hands were more calloused than Wilbur's, big enough to remind him of his older brother but still different. Less solid and weighted, almost transparent.

"Wilbur?" he stammered, his speech slurred and rough. The air tasted bitter, thickening his tongue and drying his throat.

It wasn't Techno or Phil either—their hands were always warm. He moved away from the hand to settle deeper into his bed. But there was no bed. There was no bedroom to begin with, no connection to the kitchen or to Techno's room just one door down.

He opened his eyes and a blackened state greeted him.

Oh.

He was—

He was dead.

No, no it couldn't be. He was just in his bedroom, Wilbur was there, holding him as he woke up from the night before and—

The tears fell too fast for him to realise his face was already wet.

He wished for nothing but to be back with those he loved. He didn't care if it meant he would have to repeatedly die in their arms, forced to hear the pleads of Wilbur, Techno's frustration and the sobs from Phil. He didn't care. He wanted them back, he wanted to be held.

The void offered him no comfort, no reassuring whispers, no warmth. Not like Wilbur's touch could.

He should be used to this, the loneliness in the void as time caught up and rebirth decided his next fate. But no part of him ever adjusted to the cruel abyss, the sinking loneliness and isolation. He had grown accustomed to the casual pats on the shoulder, ruffles of his hair and tight hugs. The solitary on his skin hurt. It stung to be alone now.

Tommy hated himself for letting himself believe that it would be permanent—that the love which brought yellow roses to his chest and completeness to his heart would *stay*.

He should've known that nothing stayed. Including himself.

If he screwed his eyes shut tight enough, then he'd be back. Back in the kitchen and scooped into someone's arms, given all the special treatment he normally despised. But after today, he'd accept anything.

He would wake up in his room, gaze at the wall of photos and tuck Henry back under the covers, ready for the day. There would be noise from the kitchen, clashing of frying pans as Wilbur attempted to flip pancakes, huffing from Techno's coffee machine and Phil reprimanding Wilbur for dropping another pancake on the floor. Home. It would be home.

But instead of the cluttered dining table, blinding smiles and heavens of laughter, Tommy was alone in a state of desolation.

He knew he didn't deserve this, he had more time yet Death still took him from the only life he never wanted to leave—from the one family that ever loved him.

A light yet burdening weight hauled downwards on his cold palm. Golden yarn, coated in dried blood, laid in his hands. Ariadne's thread. His myth's expression of love and loyalty, a display that twisted into one of misery and abandonment.

Was that his fate? To be loved and neglected the second his use didn't matter? It couldn't be true. It *shouldn't*.

At least it all made sense, the reason why his past foster families were pieces of shit, why his void changed with Labyrinth maze walls, ships and islands. Betrayal and abandonment riddled this life, all because one Cretan Princess wanted to be *loved*.

He tugged harshly on the thread and his throat screamed out in protest. He doubled over, clutching his neck, coughing out as something choked him. Tommy clawed at his skin, at the rope—the *thread*—wrapped around his neck like a noose. The reminder that he was a loveless being, cursed to never be fulfilled in any life, strangled him.

Bruises taunted his throat. This was his new scar, the mark of Ariadne, who killed herself on that island after her promised lover left her to die.

His neck felt lonely without the green bandana and locket there to keep it warm. It was wrong for Tubbo and Ranboo to not be constantly by his side, attached to him, no matter where they

physically were.

He was stupid to think it would transfer across lives.

Tommy wanted his best friends back, he wanted his family. He wanted to finally finish his GCSE exams, to relish in the congratulations from Niki, to thank Clementine for his English result, to make Phil pin his grades to the fridge. Amongst it all, he wanted to *live*. But it was futile. All of it was.

In the distance, a masked smile reappeared. The festering anger, the unfairness of his death, the frustration, the bloodied lips and dying in the arms of his family, it all returned. His ears rang.

“Bring me back, Zagreus,” he spat. Dream came closer with a frown. “Bring me back.”

Dream winced and shook his head slowly. “I’m sorry, Tommy.”

His grip on the thread tightened, his muscles daring him to *tug*. “What more do I have to do to show you I don’t want to do this anymore?” he asked, his voice rising. “I just want it to be over.”

Dream remained quiet. The Godly glow around him dulled, his amulet had more scratches tainting it.

“What lessons do I need to learn to finally fucking die?” he yelled, hating the other’s silence. He wanted the old Dream back, the one who didn’t hesitate to pick a fight with him, the man who shouted louder and hit back *harder*. He needed that. A return to normal, to how it used to be—how it should be.

“I wanted you to finally be free,” Dream muttered at last, pain hindering his tone.

He had never heard Dream sound so defeated before. The fight in him had died, no aspect screamed of Godhood or superiority. He didn’t like it.

“I broke so many rules, I gave you all the clues I could possibly give... for nothing,” Dream continued with wisps of guilt.

He curled his hand holding Ariadne’s thread into a fist and *yanked*. He didn’t care that it strangled him, that the constraint burned his throat and pierced his neck. He welcomed the pain, the lack of air, the essence of death. It was a part of him now.

“Tommy stop—” Dream protested, fear in his voice.

“Let me die,” he whispered, embracing the pain in his throat. His eyes watered yet no more tears fell.

He could almost imagine being trapped in a room with a single button, wooden signs of a once freeing tune of an upcoming nation plastered on the stone walls. An older man, far wiser than the other, towering over him with a sword forced into his hands.

“Kill me, Dream.”

“I can’t—”

Tommy tied the thread around Dream’s fingers, bounding the noose in his grasp. He held onto Dream with pleading in his eyes and screaming in his head. He wanted this to be over.

He missed them. Wilbur’s healing smile, the rough chuckles Techno gave out whenever Tommy said something funny, the exasperated sighs from Phil despite the grin on his face, Tubbo and Ranboo’s company on that bench in school, Niki’s calming residence. He missed it all.

There was no point in living another life if they weren’t there.

“Do it, Dream!” he shouted, his face red. “Kill me.”

“I can’t,” Dream argued, hoarse and shaky. “You’re like me, Tommy. You understand, you understand it all and I can’t- I can’t kill you.”

“I’m not like you,” he hissed, glaring with bleary and tired eyes. “I’m nothing.”

He tugged on Dream’s hand, forcing the thread to tighten around his neck. He choked and fell into Dream’s chest, his chest enflamed. He needed that sword, the same blade that took his brother’s final breath. A stab in the chest, a mercy kill, the deed of a defeated man—that was what he yearned for.

Tommy, with blurred vision, gazed at the man who made him Ariadne, who dictated his dark experiences in the foster system for Minos to make sense and let him fall in love just to pull it all from him a day before his death. If Dream cared, this would all be over. Tommy would be dead, permanently this time.

Dream untangled the thread from his hands. “It wasn’t supposed to end like this,” he mumbled. “For both of our sakes, Tommy, you were supposed to live.”

A tear rolled down Dream’s exposed cheek, painting his face with deep crevasses of remorse. Tommy gritted his teeth, anger decimating his bloodstream. Dream didn’t have the *right* to feel guilt. The crying God was the same person who fed on Tommy’s pain as he failed another life. This Dream projected Deo’s face all over the blackened void and laughed when Tommy grieved his Eurydice’s death—his other half—from his Orpheus life; this Dream mocked the Church of Prime as prayers of mercy fled from Tommy’s lips, scorch marks still littered on his Icarus hands.

Every piece of him had been wronged and abused by the masked deity, and here he was *crying*. Tommy shoved at Dream’s chest. He pushed and pushed as his face refused to dry. Dream took each shove, his feet stable on the ground as Tommy stumbled. He wanted Dream to hurt, to fall, to collapse just as he had for *years*. He needed the other to feel the pain that had been following him for centuries, ever since war stole his childhood and the Gods took away his right to die.

No amount of sorrow or tears falling down Dream's face could distract Tommy from the fact that *this* was the man who caused it all to happen.

"You fucking coward," he snarled, jaw clenched. "Just kill me!"

He begged and begged to no avail, an emotionless mask stared back with no intent of violence hidden in the painted smile. Tommy ripped the mask off his face and gripped the object that haunted his waking presence and corners of consciousness.

Green eyes, wrecked enough to seem human and diluted in agony, laid exposed looking down at him as if nothing else mattered.

Tommy threw the mask to the ground and stomped until a shattered visage littered the floor. He savoured the cracking sound as the God—no, no as the *man*—winced. There was no omnipotent gleam surrounding Dream, no shine in his amulet nor green in his cloak. Everything that made Dream *Zagreus* had faded.

Sisyphus appeared to have changed both of them. Dream had said so before, that watching Tommy cradle the dead body of his mother, who overdosed because of his own money, destroyed the entertainment of rebirth. But he still didn't get *why*. Why was he cursed in the first place? What the fuck did he *do* to deserve cyclical torture and torment, restarting life for it only to end sixteen years later?

He didn't know. He didn't want to know. There wasn't an ounce of him that simply cared anymore.

Sobs broke from his trembling lips, his blood boiled and head pounded, but for *nothing*. With a final punch to Dream's stomach, he fell to the ground. There was no point in getting up.

He touched the permanent bruising and thread wrapped around his neck and cried. A withered apology from Dream echoed the endless walls of the void and Tommy was alone again. He embraced the second layer of his skin, the familiar wound of abandonment.

His palm laid flat on the floor, fists no longer curled with anger.

He was so *tired* of this. Of having to fight back, to stand strong and take every wrongdoing forced upon his body and failed lives. He didn't want to be strong, to have to endure everything with a grain of salt and rely on no one but himself. He wanted someone to be there for him, to protect and shelter him from the cold. But that someone, that family, was gone.

A hand brushed along his shoulder. It was the same hand that combed through his hair, mimicking the comforting touch and grounding presence of Wilbur.

He looked up and froze.

White, hollow eyes, steaming with blue-stained tears, stared at him. The figure had an opaque yellow jumper, blue dye and blood blemishing the fabric, and a maroon beanie covering his

crumpled brown hair. The hole in his chest and transparency surrounding the spirit wasn't what scared Tommy, it was that the figure wore his brother's face—W. Soot's face.

"Who are you?" Tommy asked, his voice wavered.

"You know who I am," he replied, the words ominous and threatening yet his tone conveyed a soft melody, one oblivious to the hatred in the world and the black of the void.

The same softly pointed nose, thick dusted eyebrows and toothful smile. This was the man inside of Wilbur's soul. But *not*. The darkness in his eyes was replaced by a vacant tint, there was a detached essence to his face, an innocence Tommy hadn't seen in centuries. The ghost of his brother, an empty shell of an ill man who died in that buttoned room, mined into the side of a hill.

"Will," Tommy whispered, tears pricking at his eyes at just the face of his dead brother.

At this moment, he was glad the Wilbur of this life didn't share W. Soot's appearance. It took everything in him to not crumble into the arms of his dead brother, to give in to the part of him that wished to be a little kid again and hide behind the one who raised him.

His feet didn't move.

The ghost giggled, a carefree tune that drew Tommy in closer, his feet stumbled. "You've gotten taller!" he exclaimed, bubbly and free. "And! And—" he laughed again but it carried more weight this time, a piece of reality eased into him, "—I missed you!"

Tommy blinked, stumped. The ghost's toothless grin changed into a child-like pout. He sniffed, trying to contain himself; *this* version of his brother saddened him more. It was as if his brother had been shattered into pieces and glued back together, only for the most important bits, the parts that made him whole and *his*, to be missing. Where was the light-hearted glint to his narrowed gaze, the mischief equipped in his top lip, the cigarette smoke and intimidating stance?

Though, there was still a bleakness confining the ghost. The burden of his brother's memories was present, locked away but still aware of its location. His brother sowed the seeds of war and punishment and the figure once drenched in the Lethe waters and chained in Tartarus' grip paid the price.

"I missed you too," Tommy confessed, failing to keep the anguish out of his voice. His throat hurt more than it did before when Ariadne's thread constrained his neck.

The ghost's smile brightened, his tongue peeked between his teeth, happiness radiated off him. His dead brother hovered closer, his hand caressed Tommy's cheek, he pinched it teasingly. Just like he used to.

Another tear rolled down Tommy's face, wetting the ghost's hand. He never wanted the touch to leave. He didn't want his brother to leave him again.

Yet, the touch disappeared as quickly as it began.

“I have something for you,” the ghost gasped, the forgetful haze leaving his hollow eyes for just a moment. Tommy wiped his face, rubbing where his brother’s hand was.

A familiar book materialised in the ghost’s hands. *His* notebook.

He reached forward and took it, the thread tangled around his fingers stinging as it skimmed against the leather. Tommy bit the inside of his cheek, conflicted. With this book in his hands, it confirmed everything—that his last life, his Ariadne myth, was over and the cycle would repeat soon.

But the excitement practically propelling off of his brother’s ghost confused him. Why would he be happy about this? Why was he happy about *any* of this? The misguided euphoria pained him more than it should have. Only hardening the reminder that this was a lost spirit, forced into forgetfulness and tortured for years on end in the depths of the Underworld—left astray in more ways than just one.

“Open it,” the ghost said, gesturing to the page with the old bookmark.

Hesitant, Tommy did so.

Something fell from the bookmarked page. He grabbed it and his face paled. It was his favourite polaroid picture they took from that day trip to London, the one where Ranboo’s uncovered face was too elated to not treasure and Tubbo’s cheerful smile was more infectious than usual. His fingers traced the image, circling the heads of his best friends—people he would never see again. He would never hear their laughter or teasing sighs whenever he made a dumb or immature joke. Tommy dreaded the day he would forget what their voices sounded like.

He rubbed his eyes before they watered again and tucked the image back into the opened page. It was something he needed to get over before rebirth took it all away.

At least he wouldn’t forget their faces.

The ghostly hand returned to his shoulder as he peered down at the chosen page. It wasn’t blank. There was writing on it that didn’t belong to him—he didn’t write this. Smudges followed every written ‘s’, each ‘a’ was always connected to the proceeding letter. It was Phil’s handwriting.

His bottom lip trembled again as he read the rushed writing. His heart clenched at every full stop and damp teardrop on the page.

The papers to adopt you were almost finished. You weren’t supposed to go.

We wanted you to stay, I hope you know that.

I won't be able to look at the colour red the same without picturing that fucking shirt you never stopped wearing no matter Wilbur's protests at your shit fashion sense. Pancakes, the blue in everything, old Medieval music, the third seat on the sofa—even cows now, I didn't think a cow plushie would have such an impact. But that's what you did best. Impacted us.

You won't be replaced, you won't be forgotten. I'll make sure of it.

Even though you were never officially my son, you always were to me and always will be.

I love you.

Arms held him as he sobbed into his dead brother's shoulder, his chest heaved, aching at every broken attempt to breathe. He loved them- he loved them so fucking much and they would never hear him say it back.

"Are they happy tears?" the ghost asked, worried. His transparent hands rubbed circles into Tommy's back. "My tears burn but yours... yours shouldn't. They need to be happy to not burn."

Tommy sobbed harder, desperately gripping at his brother, waiting for the cold in his heart to disappear. But the ghost emitted no warmth. His brother made a noise of distress as Tommy left his question unanswered.

"They're happy tears, Will," Tommy whispered, his voice breaking. "Look," he attempted to smile, "I'm happy."

The ghost nodded, his demeanour lightening. "Good! That's good."

"Do you remember what you did?" the ghost hummed, confused. "To L'Manberg," he continued and paused, "and to me..."

His brother stilled. "I didn't hurt anyone yet I'm the one who pays for it," was all the ghost said with no more light to his eyes, no smile on his lips. The carefree tune descended into a minor key, filled with interrupted cadences full of blank memories and a slow pace, accommodating the overwhelming sense that this was his fault—that this was deserved despite the misplaced suffering.

Tommy regretted asking.

"I want to go home," he whispered into his dead brother's neck, his eyes clenched shut.

"L'Manberg isn't far from here," the ghost whispered back as he stroked Tommy's hair gently. "But she doesn't like me going there."

He paused, frowning, "Who?"

His brother stilled again, sharper this time. The ghost sighed and released his grip on Tommy.

“I need to go,” he said, urgency and haste corrupting his soothing tone. “I need to- she wouldn’t want me here.”

“Who, Will?” the ghost shook his head and moved away. “No, no, wait don’t go! Please don’t go,” Tommy cried out, grasping for his brother’s hands, only for his skin to pass straight through. “Don’t leave me again.”

Despite his bleeding pleas and flowing tears, with one final touch to his cheek, his brother bared a radiant grin and departed, taking all the light and yellow in the void with him.

Tommy shrunk deeper into himself and let his head slam against the floor. He couldn’t do this anymore. He can’t—

It was too much.

His skin stung again, more painful than before. He didn’t even get to say goodbye.

The croaking of ravens disturbed his misery. Wings flapping circled his head and steps echoed closer.

He scrambled up from the floor, his back scraping as he shuffled away from the noises. His arms shook by his side as a figure darkened the void.

It was the same tall figure from the Palace. As it crept forward, more features became known. A dark purple gown, adorned with withered flowers, and a veil covered *her* face. Black wings fluttered over her shoulders and a raven sat on one hand, a scythe gripped tightly in the other.

She stopped metres away from Tommy, though her eyes didn’t focus on him. “Zagreus, come out of hiding.” Her voice was as elegant as she looked, dipped in authority and strength, yet there was an ounce of kindness, of heart.

“Lady Death, please—” Dream emerged from the shadows, his face paler than before and eyes dulled to a grey. He stood in between the woman and Tommy, his legs quivered yet his arms stayed steady, spread out in front of him. It was almost as if he was protecting Tommy, creating a barrier between him and upcoming death. Dream looked back at him, lips thinned and face furrowed. He was scared.

“You know better than to speak,” she said with no need to raise her voice or change her tone. Tommy flinched as her wings sprouted further.

“Don’t touch him,” Dream ordered, his jaw clenched.

“You know our deal, Zagreus,” she said, her head tilted but not mockingly. She walked closer, the veil slowly revealing her face. Her hair matched the feathers of the raven perched on her hand. It was almost familiar. “Return to your cell until I decide what to do with you.”

Screaming rattled the void as shadows encaged Dream whole. A whimper left Tommy’s lips. He was alone with her.

The woman sighed and lifted her veil. She had a tanned face, almost black eyes, complemented with winged eyeliner and red lipstick. Her cheekbones sharpened as she smiled. He had seen this woman's face before, framed on the walls of the Craft household.

"I am Death," she said softly, "but you would know me better as Kristin."

Tommy froze.

Kristin chuckled lightly and her raven flew away. A single feather dropped to the floor. "We have a lot to discuss."

Chapter End Notes

mumza supremacy

Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The person—the *Goddess*—representing all that was taken from Tommy, the roots of the trauma that prickled at his skin and racked his head, stood in front of him. Kristin Craft, Phil's deceased wife and Wilbur's mother.

Kristin stared at him, a world of emotions and thoughts idly swirling in her black and tainted eyes. Eyes that had seen all forms of death, betrayals reminiscent of easier days, suicides too similar to Sisyphus' boulder, and children begging for more time.

His tongue wouldn't let him speak. But he didn't know what he'd say even if he could. Tommy had visited her gravestone, read her name and departing date on the monument. She wasn't supposed to be one of *them*, one of the Gods who tormented his inapparent free will and let Dream release levels of hell upon him. She was supposed to be dead—a wife and mother removed too soon from a loving and complete family—not Death itself.

"I've wanted to meet you for a while now," Kristin said, breaking the tense silence. She smiled sweetly yet there was a layer hidden in the upturned corners of her lips. Something dark.

Tommy hated it. the casual demeanour of someone so... dangerous. This was a person more powerful than Dream, the one who reduced the God to a quivering mess in the Palace and encased him in shadows with a wordless command. If Dream could project and extort so much pain and anguish onto Tommy whilst being a minor God, then what could Kristin do? What *would* she do to him?

His hands shook. But whether it was out of fear or anger was the question.

Everyone had mourned her. Wilbur had been destroyed by her death and it turned out she wasn't even fucking *dead*. She had wrecked a once whole family, decimated their relationships with each other, fractured the love and communication between a grieving father and a son left dealing with *everything*, and for what?

She was Death, surely she understood the ruination that it caused, the evil of its nature. And yet she let it leave a mark on *his* family.

"Are you the reason I died earlier than I should've?" he asked, trying to keep his fury under control. Though, by the way her grip tightened on her scythe, it was poorly hidden.

She nodded solemnly, almost embarrassed by her answer.

He bit his inner cheek. He shouldn't lose himself to his anger, especially to *her*. Even though she was responsible for it, this was Phil's wife—the woman in those framed photographs on

the wall, who smiled so widely with her arms around her husband and son, the woman Phil loved with all his heart.

But he couldn't keep it to himself. He shouldn't have died in Wilbur's arms, on the floor of a kitchen with Phil knelt by his side and Techno pleading for the myth to be solved, for Ariadne to be saved by her Dionysus.

The thread around his neck strained.

"I didn't even get to say goodbye," he spat, his jaw clenched and teeth gritted. "You should know how important goodbyes are with how you fucked Wilbur up with yours."

His conversation with Wilbur in the graveyard was one he could never forget—how Wilbur's self-destruction and hatred stemmed from her delirious words in that hospital bed.

She lowered her head, the bonnet covering her shame.

"Were you even sick or was that a lie?" he asked, his eyes narrowed at the deity.

"Death does not lie," Kristin stated.

Tommy scoffed, "But it *takes*, it takes so fucking much and you just let it."

"If there is anyone else in these realms who understands the burden of death, Tommy, it is me," she whispered, her tone heavy and sombre. Her lips thinned as she continued, "I tried to stay, I tried to be a mother to Wilbur for *years* until I needed to return to my duties. And even then, I tried to balance being mortal and the taker of souls, and that killed me."

He flinched inwards as she stepped forward. Her movement echoed in the void, making the darkness seem more daunting and emptier than before.

"That sickness was real. It stole every part of me and almost my Godhood. It took me centuries in the Underworld to build that back up, but it was worth it. Seeing my boy say my name for the first time, being there as he learnt how to play the piano and sing his heart out to any tune he came across, it was all worth it."

"You still left them," he muttered, glaring at her. "Did they even know?"

Kristin lowered her scythe deeper into her side. "No, no Phil and Wilbur didn't know of my Godhood," she admitted, pain plastered beneath the shadow of the bonnet. "Techno though, he knew," a timid smile snuck upon her lips, "and he even said it was easy to figure out ever since he found out about the reality of our mythology from Niki."

"And you didn't think to tell them that you weren't truly gone?"

He thought of a younger Wilbur, one more tormented and explosive, riddling with self-loathing and disgust, and what difference it would have done if he *knew*, if he knew that the mother he was mourning could still see him grow and progress, as he learnt the harder chords of the guitar and how to control his breathing when singing. A mother, still absent, but not gone.

“Trust me when I say it hurts less when they think death is permanent,” she said, her brows furrowed at him as if she knew what thoughts circled his head. “There is pain in waiting for the slightest possibility that they’d return, that *I’d* return.”

He shook his head. “Do you really believe that?”

Kristin stayed silent.

Phil wouldn’t have thought his unconditional love for a woman, who brought light to the darkest rooms and smiles to uneased souls, would forever be one-sided the moment that gravestone heeded its position in that dirt. If he *knew*.

“I did what I had to do, Tommy,” she said at last, her voice more wistful than before.

“Was taking me away from them something you needed to do as well?”

“You were taken too soon for a reason, Tommy.”

He bristled in his anger, his fists curled, nails piercing his palms. He couldn’t stop the thoughts of how he would one day forget Wilbur’s face and smile, yet forever remember the grip of his arms as his older brother held him as he died.

“Zagreus had gone too far,” she said. “His petty revenge for his patron’s death exceeded centuries of pain for you, and you were just a child.” She watched carefully as his shoulders tensed. “He never did specify why you’re like this, did he?”

Dream had told him numerous reasons, ones that only provoked more questions that would remain unanswered and mocked. That it was a lesson, a punishment, something he deserved. But it didn’t make sense.

“As I said, it was petty,” Kristin began. “You and your little Revolution killed King George, Zagreus’ patron. So, he believed this curse would suffice, a good and limited punishment. Reincarnation and rebirth always was his speciality,” her tone turned bitter. “But he didn’t expect it to progress *this* far, to the point where one boy lived more lives and deaths than he should have.”

An amulet appeared in Kristin’s hands, engraved with the same symbol that branded his left wrist. Dream’s amulet. Yet, no scratches dulled its shine. She placed it in Tommy’s palm, the cold metal inducing shivers across his tense shoulders. There was writing in the gold, names with Greek myths attached to them.

Tobias Underscore – Pandora.

Fundy Jonatahan – Medea.

He frowned at the names, at their myths and froze as he read his brother’s. *Prometheus*. His brother was Prometheus. The trickster Titan who defied Zeus and stole his fire, bringing knowledge and survival to humanity, ensuring civilisations and safety. His actions brought

great consequences, for both himself and the humanity he intended to save. Prometheus was condemned to a cycle of pain, nailed to a mountain to have his liver eaten and replenished, and Zeus created Pandora and her box filled with all the darkness—sins, disease, poverty, war and death—as a punishment to mankind.

Just like with his brother, Prometheus reduced the world to a cruel fate after his departure, sowing the seeds of inevitable destruction.

Tommy grasped the amulet harshly in his hands, the object that held all the curses of his loved ones, the power that devastated *everything*.

“I thought for a while that the King was the only mortal Zagreus had grown attached to, but then you came under my radar,” Kristin announced and the amulet vanished from his grip.

He stilled, not liking this information.

“What are you going to do with him?” he asked, hating how a part of him was concerned for Dream.

Kristin’s mouth twisted with distaste. “Why do you care what happens to *him*?”

“I don’t- he...” Tommy trailed off, not sure. His head ached with conflict. Dream’s last moment in the void was him trying to *protect* Tommy, standing in front of him almost shielding him from more harm. “Are you going to kill him?”

“Even I, as Death, cannot kill a God,” she retorted.

“You sound as if you’ve tried.”

“Oh don’t tell me you haven’t noticed Dream’s tired appearance. The blood on his mask, the scratches on his amulet, his draining power... that was all I could do.”

“But why?” Tommy asked. “Why do you care?”

Kristin sighed and moved forward. He should be scared. This was death—no, this was *Death*, the root of Tommy’s demise and problems—but the soft gleam in her face, the roundness in her eyes and sharp cheekbones as she smiled, it didn’t bring fear. It brought solace, something so appeasing that the war in his head faded as he focused on her presence.

Her hand reached over in front of him, steady yet hesitant. Despite the forceful nature of death, how it took with no regard of acceptance, she waited for his permission. He nodded and she gently caressed his cheek, held his face in her hand.

It was different to the other God’s touch, to Dream’s, who clasped his cheek with such guilt, aware that the pain on Tommy’s face was *his* fault. Kristin though, she touched him as if instead of Death, a Mother Goddess, one so benevolent and mindful to all her creation.

“I must admit, at first I only paid attention to you because of Phil,” she said, light sparked in her eyes as she spoke his name. “It’s the reason I found out that there were still lost souls

cursed by Zagreus. But as I watched, you intrigued me,” her face creased with consideration, “and there was something weirdly endearing about you, lovable even.”

His cheeks blushed. Anger still festered beneath his skin, yet just by hearing her voice as she spoke of her family and apparent *love* for him, it all halted. Death was a scary thing, but no one ever discussed the enticing nature of it—the part that hoped to succumb under its careful grip one day, hopefully on a pleasant and fulfilling evening where all had been finished and there was nothing left to do but *wait*.

Kristin’s index finger brushed along his flustered face, chuckling as it reddened. It was the same hearty chuckle that Phil always did. She pinched his cheek before letting go.

“Well, I’m not surprised the embodiment of death loves me,” Tommy said in a joking manner, though there was a sinister truth to it.

Her black wings ruffled, hovering closer to her shoulders in almost a protective fashion. “I am sorry that my domain hasn’t let you rest,” she said softly, regret deep in her tone. “But it is because of Zagreus that this has happened, his curse has brought my domain along.”

Tommy stalled at the reminder. Her previous touch on his cheek distracted him from the impending storm inside his head. “Dream cared about me once.”

Kristin frowned. “Are you sure?”

Disregarding his doubt, he bit his lip and nodded. “We were friends at one point.”

“Okay,” she said, still sceptical. “Prove it to me then. Prove to me that Zagreus isn’t all that bad and I’ll spare him.”

She made it sound like a game, a fun little activity that induced nothing but conflict in Tommy. He didn’t know what to do. He didn’t necessarily want Dream to get off scot-free, the fucker deserved *something* to happen to him, but not death. Well, maybe but—

Tommy sighed. He just didn’t know.

“They say Death is the cousin of Sleep,” Kristin said with her hand returning to his cheek. The cold trailed up to under his eyes. “Close your eyes and think of him. We shall see if there is redemption in him.”

Tommy huffed before shutting his eyes. He was unsure of what to think about. His relationship with Dream was a difficult one. For centuries, Tommy had been a gaming piece for Dream to knock about, to play with so the years of boredom pass by easily—whether that meant watching a child try to figure out the myth of his lifetime before he even developed and discovered his true-self and matured personality or torturing him in a state of darkness.

But there was a time, a simpler time, when Tommy considered Dream his friend. Someone he trusted whole-heartedly, someone he could rely on and ranted to when the harsh winds and loneliness in exile got too much. But, as with everything good in Tommy’s life, that trust and

happiness subverted itself and twisted into just another face of an abuser hidden with tight smiles and hidden motives.

His hand rubbed the tattoo on his left wrist and the biting breeze of exile returned.

Kristin was no longer by his side and the fear that had been prickling under his skin ever since he opened his eyes to the void resurfaced. He needed her comforting touch and contradicting presence—an aura that drained the warmth out of all life yet provided a substitute far better than heat.

He was back on that island, the lands of Logstedshire. His own personal Purgatory, though no sins were cleansed here. The tent Dream had helped him set up during his first week was still mounted in the mud, the jukebox Dream gifted him was there as well, visible as the slit of the tent peered open with each gust of wind. Such scenery, such items that once brought Tommy serenity, comfortability and routine, now brought pain.

Tommy noticed a figure in the distance, a cloaked man sitting on the docks. It was Dream, an unmasked mortal who hide his Godhood from a vulnerable boy, too busy grieving the death of his older brother and betrayal from his best friend to notice the ill intentions of the man. He remembered when he used to sit by Dream at the docks and stared down at the ocean floor, dreading the thoughts looming in his head. The desire to jump in with an anvil tied to his ankle, the yearning for his lungs to collapse as water seeped in, the want for a slow and painful death. But Dream was there for him, he rubbed his back, distracted him and played a 'disc' in the jukebox.

It didn't take long for that welcoming rub on his back to turn into punches, wrenching kicks to the gut and cuts from knives they once used to make meals for each other on cold, lonely nights.

The wind picked up, violating the sensitivity of Tommy's skin and Dream had moved. The deceitful God now stood next to the stone path, towering over a younger Tommy, rips tore into his clothing, the blue in his eyes had faded, and one of his shoes was missing. Exhaustion took its toll on him. He looked dead, and if Tommy recalled correctly, he *wanted* to be. The same man who offered Tommy all the comfort and materials he needed at the beginning of exile had a flint and steel in one hand and an explosive in the other.

"Put your items in the hole." The breeze swallowed Dream's cruel order, words that became an obsessive tradition, but the Tommy's of both lives heard them perfectly.

He couldn't stop his heart from pounding, he couldn't do *anything*. It was happening again and there was nothing he could do about it.

This, *this* was Dream. The predecessor of every scar on his body, every wound that taunted his sleepless nights. Change was a common subject to Tommy, with how every sixteen years everything he ever knew vanished, but this change, the change from Dream to the Zagreus he knew now... that was a change he didn't know how to deal with.

The one who moments prior in the void had attempted to protect him was the one responsible for everything painful in Tommy's life.

A whimper left his lips as the explosion rattled the leaves off the oak trees and blistered younger Tommy's skin. No one ever told him the correct distance to stand from an explosive.

Croaks from ravens pierced his ears, even more than the volatile blasts of younger Tommy's items combusting under a tyrant God's hand. He blinked, a single tear skimming down his cheek, and the lingering terrain of Logstedshire shifted to the black of the void.

Wings swept against his shoulders and arms dressed in silk wrapped around him. A hug from Death felt more familiar than any other touch he had received. He didn't realise he was shaking.

"I'm sorry," Kristin mumbled into his trembling skin, her face wet. "I didn't mean to make you see that—"

"It's my fault for thinking I was over it all," he whispered, exhausted.

Tommy nestled deeper into her arms, finding comfort in the soft feathers of her wings. He needed to forget that place, the explosives, the tower he almost jumped off. He wanted it all to go away. But it never would.

She shook her head adamantly. "There are things I am not over, Tommy. No matter how many eons have passed for me since I first remember meeting Phil, I will never get over the guilt I have for leaving him alone," her voice wavered. "The love I felt- the love I *still* feel for him haunts me."

Kristin kissed the top of his head. "Despite me being many, many years old, healing is new to me," she said. "There is hope for you, not everything is linear, Tommy."

He frowned, "How old are—?"

"I thought Phil taught you better than to ask a woman how old she is," Kristin joked and Tommy forgot about the shaking in his hands for just a moment.

Part of him wanted to stay here, in the void with Kristin, even though the rebirth he could feel pulling at his soul and anger still buried in his gut towards the very woman who hugged him. She had taken him from his family too soon. He could never forgive that.

"Y'know, I'm friends with Adrasteia," Kristin said and paused for the information to sink in. Adrasteia, the Goddess of inevitable fate, the pressing necessity of punishment, "and she's closely linked to Nemesis, the Goddess of divine retribution and revenge." He scowled, not understanding what she meant. "You can decide what happens to Zagreus, Tommy."

A breath lodged in Tommy's throat.

"I think your fate for him will be kinder than mine," she continued.

The idea aggravated his head was far from kind. From just the reminder of exile, it was something cruel, malicious yet deserving, *needed*. Karma sounded nice.

"I have... one idea," he said. He spoke it aloud and Kristin grinned.

“A fitting punishment,” she stated, nodding. “I’m sure he’ll enjoy *that*.”

Silence bloomed between them. Tommy’s eyes focused on the sharp blade of Kristin’s scythe.

“What do I do now?” his voice faltered, frightened of her upcoming answer. “Are you going to make me go through rebirth again?”

His body knew it was soon, the symptoms were there—boiling blood under his skin, aching to his back, his new mark around his neck pulsing. It was soon.

“You have lived so many lives, but have you truly lived at all?” Kristin smiled at him sadly, regret in the creases of her mouth. “Everyone you’ve ever loved has died on you and finally, you died on them,” she sighed with weighted remorse. “I took you earlier for a reason, Tommy. I think it’s time this cycle breaks.”

Tommy froze at her words. He didn’t dare to move.

“I’m sure Hades won’t mind *one* resurrection,” she chuckled and elation brightened eyes. “Send them my love, would you?”

With a cold touch to his right wrist, one that blistered his skin and inked his departing soul, Tommy was finally free.

A white sheet brushed against his lips as he sharply exhaled, his clumped eyelashes sticking to the fabric. Everything hurt, every muscle he tensed, every limb he moved—pain cremated him.

He winced and pushed the sheet off his body, disregarding how his skin screamed and itched at the movement. The air he breathed didn’t pierce his lungs nor poison his tongue. It was familiar and carried the same smell as that sandalwood incense Techno convinced Phil to put it in the living room.

It was bright. This wasn’t the void. Soft cushions anchored laid underneath him. He was back. He was *home*.

A shorter boy with brown hair collided into him, arms squeezed around his waist. Tubbo’s sobbing echoed in his ears and his shoulder dampened with tears. Tommy couldn’t stop the smile from curling onto his lips, his cheeks ached but he didn’t care.

“It’s okay, I’m not going anywhere, not anymore,” Tommy whispered into Tubbo’s hair, gripping the back of his t-shirt tightly as the other clung to his chest. He inhaled deeply, grinning to himself. This was real, this was *real*. Tubbo was really in his arms and no curse reduced the time he had left with him. He could stay here forever and there wasn’t a piece of him that didn’t want that.

Reluctantly, Tubbo let go of him, his eyes red and puffy. He expected his best friend to say something back, to express how glad he was that Tommy was back or how he missed him.

Tubbo shared a smile with him, then promptly slapped Tommy round the face. “You fucking piece of shit, don’t do that again.”

“Ow! What the fuck—”

“You promised me you wouldn’t die!” Tubbo exclaimed as Tommy held his face. “You said you wouldn’t leave whilst knowing you eventually would.”

“Okay, can we do this another time or—?” he slapped Tommy again. “Stop hitting me!”

Tubbo leaned into his side. “I love you.”

“You sure have a fucked way to show it,” he grumbled, still holding the part of his face that stung. “But yeah, I love you too.” Tubbo laughed and poked his cheek, ignoring the insults Tommy muttered under his breath.

“Um,” a voice stuttered. Ranboo stood by the entrance to the living room, shock evident in his face as he gaped at them. His eyes flickered down at Tommy’s lap and rested back on the two of them.

Tommy looked down and frowned at the crumpled alliums. Ranboo’s face flushed. “You seriously got me flowers?”

“You just came back to life and your first interaction with me is to insult my birthday gift to you,” Ranboo complained, his brows furrowed.

He paused, not knowing how to answer. “Uh, yeah?”

Ranboo tackled him into a hug, unconcerned about the squished flowers. Tommy welcomed the boy’s grip and chuckled at the awkward position between the three of them on one corner of the sofa. “I missed you so much.”

“How long was I gone?” Tommy asked as Ranboo refused to ease his grasp whilst Tubbo tried to fit more comfortably on the sofa.

“A day.”

“Fucking pussies,” he joked, pushing at Ranboo’s shoulder. “You couldn’t even last a day without me.”

“Shut up,” the two muttered and huddled closer to him, almost afraid Tommy would disappear.

The tingling on his skin hadn’t stopped since his first breath under the white sheet. It hurt to be hugged, to be touched by hands that weren’t cold and empty, transparent like the ghost’s, but he let it proceed. They needed it more than him.

He honestly thought his chest would explode at how fast his heart was beating—not out of fear like in the void, but out of joy. He was back, back in the arms of those he loved, with no threat of upcoming and inevitable death. He could finally finish school with Tubbo and Ranboo by his side, grow old with the Crafts as their adopted son.

“Tubbo, where did you put the—” Niki stopped in her step, the plastic cup in her hands dropped to the floor. “Holy shit.”

“You are correct about the ‘Holy’ part because I’m kinda like Jesus now,” Tommy said with a grin.

Instead of the usual begrudging annoyance flashing over Niki’s face, her eyes widened and she beamed at him. Niki stepped closer and with hesitancy, she reached over and touched his arm, flinching at the contact.

“Yes, I am alive,” he said, still grinning at her.

“How?” she gasped.

“Death liked me,” Tommy explained vaguely, confusing the room even more.

“What’s on your arm?” Niki asked, pointing at his right wrist.

He looked down at where his right sleeve had been pulled up. It was another tattoo, black ink engraving the symbol of Thanatos. “Phil is going to fucking kill me.”

“Technically he already has—”

“Tubbo shut it.”

Tommy let out a laugh, it felt rough on his throat as if laughter was uncommon. Of course Kristin had left him a departing gift, something she knew Phil would hate.

He was alive, he was fucking *alive*. No longer bound to a curse that took everything from him—his first family, his freedom, sanity and childhood. He could enjoy life without counting down the days until the end.

For the first time in his life, Tommy was sixteen and he couldn't be happier.

I wanted to explain real quick why I chose Fundy and Tobias to have those Greek myths in their first lives.

- Fundy as Medea. So Medea was involved with the myth of Jason (the lad who got the Golden Fleece), she saved his life and married him, has kids with him, yet Jason abandons her years later to marry someone else. In revenge, she kills his new wife and murders her own children. I chose her partly because of the betrayal she felt (Wilbur in the lore since he's Fundy's father) and because Fundy eventually betrayed L'Manberg (before the second blowing of the country). Plus, insanity is a common theme to his lore and Medea is basically that.

- Tobias as Pandora; basically in my opinion with all the DreamSMP lore, Tubbo was set up for half the shit and his hand was forced in a lot of shit he gets blamed for (though it doesn't take away from the fact that he did do those things, e.g. exile Tommy). And Pandora was set up for destruction since Zeus gave her all these qualities, such as curiosity, and a box he told her not to open and tf, you made her curious of course she's gonna eventually open it. Plus, in this, Wilbur (kinda DreamSMP) is Prometheus and the consequences of his actions create Pandora, in my opinion, since Wilbur was such a shit President/leader (after his exile into Pogtopia), Tubbo was doomed to be a conflicted President since he had no one to base his actions off, to learn from.

Then with W. Soot as Prometheus, I chose him because of how in the beginning, Wilbur gave people new knowledge (fire) by revolting against Dream and ensured their survival for a while in a new nation, yet his actions created a fuckton of wars, pain, deaths etc (like how Zeus created Pandora and unreleased darkness into the world with her box). And I viewed his declining mental health from the point of his failed campaign as similar to Prometheus' punishment, and Phil acts as Heracles (since Heracles came over and saved him from the mountain he was chained to, eg gave him what he wanted, mercy kill in the lore).

Though I must say, characterisations are off for c!Wilbur (lore) bc of how he's different compared to W. Soot, as in I don't think in the lore c!Wilbur ever physically hurt tommy, plus he's less calculated/manipulative and more complex.

ANYWAY

just a little bit left to go now until this fic is over! I'm not ready to let go of it :((

also, I can't believe this got over 100k hits??? like hello wtf this is the first fanfiction I've properly written and published and all of you guys' responses, comments and attention is just,,, mans I can't even explain it, I'm very appreciative of it all and thank you so much for this!

have a nice day lads <3

Epilogue

Chapter Notes

last chapter D:

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ever since Niki had texted Techno to come back home, Tommy's leg couldn't stop shaking. He didn't know if there was a correlation between the two or if it was just a side-effect of resurrection, but either way, it was annoying. Everything else still hurt; his skin, bones, muscles at each movement.

He leaned his back against the bathroom door, his eyes avoiding the mirror. He was scared to look into it, afraid that he wouldn't recognise the person staring back at him. When he eventually did, his jaw clenched. Bruises painted the length of his neck, shades of purple and blue, colours that probably wouldn't fade. The remains of Ariadne. He buried the insecurities riddling inside of him, the desperate need to hide the marks, to suppress the evidence of his death.

A coldness crept down the back of his neck. Despite there being no thread wrapped around his throat, the sensation never left.

He splashed water on his face, grasping harshly onto the sink, fighting off whimpers as it wet his skin. The sensitivity hadn't dulled yet.

Tommy walked out of the bathroom and back into the living room, where he left Tubbo.

It seemed Tubbo noticed his anxiety with how a frown immediately came to his face. "You alright, boss man?"

He bit on his cheek; he craved to lie and say it was all okay. But it *wasn't*. Instead, he pointed at his neck, the cascading bruises permanently blemishing his throat, and sighed.

Tubbo took one glance at his neck and rushed out of the room.

Tommy stood in shock, not really knowing what to do. What was the appropriate response when your best friend, who you loved unconditionally and never would judge, ran away from you the second they noticed the bruises that fuelled his new fragility?

He gulped, struggling to keep the newfound tears swelling in his eyes from falling, as silence furnished the empty room.

But minutes later, Tubbo ran back with Ranboo trailing after him, a bright smile on his lips and items in his hands.

“I am so fucking stupid,” Tommy muttered to himself as he realised what Tubbo had rushed to get.

“Here.” Tubbo chuckled at him the freshly washed green bandana and ‘My Beloved’ locket Ranboo had gifted him.

“It’ll cover up your neck,” Ranboo said, gesturing to the bandana.

Warmth charged through him, filling every crevasse that once felt abandoned and lost with fondness and adoration. He stroked the soft fabric and steel chain. He didn’t deserve them, he didn’t deserve the kindness from Tubbo’s heart and Ranboo’s selfless nature. With them, he felt complete, as if no insecurity or doubt could darken his head or poison his mood.

He tied the bandana around his neck, in the similar fashion Phil had done for MCC and clasped the seal of the locket. Tommy exhaled, comforted by the touch of the fabric and crisp metal chain.

“Thank you,” he whispered.

“We’ll leave you when your brothers come back,” Tubbo stated, although it sounded like he didn’t want to.

Ranboo rolled his eyes at him. “Yeah, you should have privacy with them,” he said, more directed to Tubbo than to Tommy. “We’ll just be in your room though. You won’t get rid of us that easily.”

Tommy grinned and nodded, still fuzzy inside from the accessories around his neck.

The rustling of keys came from outside the entrance door. Tommy froze. This was it, he would see them again. No longer would his final memories of his brothers be tarnished by him dying on the kitchen floor, their arms clinging onto his deceased body, desperate to not mourn a boy who had wormed his way into their hearts.

The moment Wilbur stepped inside, stalling in his step at the sight of him, Tommy knew he wasn’t ready. He wasn’t ready to greet the people who held him as he begged for more time, for answers, as *they* begged for him to not leave. But he did. He *did* leave, and regardless of him coming back, that wasn’t just something you could get over. His death would leave a stain on their minds and he could do nothing to remove it. No amounts of reunions nor cradles to the chest could make his brothers forget him breathing his last ragged breath whilst in their arms.

The pain spiked in his skin as Wilbur rushed forward, almost as if anticipated the next chain of events. Wilbur’s arms pulled him close, hugging him tightly. The ridges of his glasses dug into his head but he didn’t care. This was Wilbur, this was the person he trusted wholeheartedly and loved even more.

Wilbur kept mumbling things under his breath, phrases adorned in affection and relief; words Tommy would treasure forever and recite in his head later when sleep wouldn’t come to him.

He didn't want to let go. And Wilbur wouldn't let him.

"I'll give it a day until you're calling me a gremlin again," Tommy said with a wide smile on his wet face. He didn't know when he started crying, but just like the ghost had declared, these were happy tears.

Wilbur scoffed, "Shut up and hug me back, you asshole."

Tommy chuckled and interlocked his hands around Wilbur's back, smiling into his upper chest. If he could choose one moment to forever redo, it would be this. Tucked into Wilbur, surrounded by his scent and warmth, protected and safe.

"Don't do that again," Wilbur whispered, his voice rough and strained. "Don't leave me."

"I won't," he whispered back. And for the first time, he meant it. He could say those words without hesitating with remorse, knowing that a day would come on his sixteenth birthday where he'd be taken from this world and reborn into years later. But now... now he was here to stay.

"Good." Wilbur echoed his thoughts. "You mean the world to me, okay?"

He buried his face deeper into Wilbur's sweater, the corners of his eyes watered. "I'm not leaving you alone again," Tommy mumbled.

Steps resounded throughout the corridor. Tommy, with his arms still secured around Wilbur, turned his head. Techno stood to the side, leaning on the wall with an inkling of a smile on his lips. Wilbur released his grip.

Tommy faced him, apprehensive all of a sudden. Techno's eyes weren't focused on his face, unlike Wilbur who wouldn't stop staring at him. But instead, they focused on his right forearm—on the new tattoo that branded his wrist. The mark of Thanatos.

"Lady Death?" Techno asked and Tommy nodded.

Seemingly satisfied with his answer, Techno slowly walked towards them and sighed, almost waiting for something to happen. Tommy tilted his head, confused until Techno huffed and opened up his arms.

A grin brightened up his face as he engulfed Techno into a hug.

Disgruntled, Techno allowed the contact but eventually caved in to the touch and wrapped his arms around Tommy. "I'm glad you're back," Techno said.

"Me too," he responded, leaning into him as close as he could. "I found what I'm looking for," he mumbled, referencing the note Techno left him in his notebook.

"It's us?" Techno asked softly in surprise.

Tommy scoffed and tugged on his arms. "Of course it's you guys."

The tips of Techno's ears reddened and Tommy laughed quietly. Despite the restless commotion around him and pain lingering everywhere, he welcomed it all. He was back with his family, in their arms with no gold blood staining his lips or death lodged in his heart.

Freedom wasn't the tattoo on his right wrist, displaying Death's possession and exception, or the broken nature of his curse. Freedom was being in his brother's grip, safe and secluded from harm—it was the love beating in his chest.

Beside them, Wilbur hummed with content and ruffled Tommy's hair. A gesture so informed and loving that it *hurt*. Though, Wilbur's hand stopped and he frowned. Wilbur's eyes were narrowed at his blonde locks.

"Did you dye your hair?" Wilbur asked and Techno eased his hold to look at what Wilbur was referring to.

"No, why?"

Wilbur threaded out a section of Tommy's hair, his brows furrowed. "You have a white streak."

The coldness encasing his heart, the part that Wilbur's hand and Techno's arms had heated, chilled to its core. An ache settled in his chest.

Ranboo's conversation with him from months ago, during that night after MCC, haunted him. The ship of Theseus paradox, whether or not an object that had all its components replaced was the same object as before. Was Tommy, with all these new doubts, guilt, tattoos and white streaks still *Tommy*?

He didn't feel the same. Everything felt sharper, more sensitive and daunting. Death had changed him and the changes were hidden in plain sight, silently waiting to be recognised and hated. It seemed as though Kristin hadn't left him untouched—something was needed to remind him that the curse had been broken. Immortality and golden ichor no longer flourished in his blood.

Even though he was free, he wasn't completely safe. A common illness could kill him, a simple accident on the street could hospitalise and leave him in a critical state. He could die and when he eventually will, the afterlife would be there for him. No more voids, no more Gods of rebirth. Just peace.

"Toms?" a voice faltered.

Tommy blinked, his eyes heavy and fogged. Wilbur held his face in his hands, his thumb gently rubbing his cheekbone.

His breathing evened.

"You with us?" Wilbur continued, worry laced in his tone.

"Yeah," he exhaled, "yeah I am."

A shadow laced in upcoming doom burdened his shoulders, a sensation familiar to the omen that circled him every day the night bowed to midnight, announcing another day he wasted in blinded agony until his birthday commenced his death. But it shouldn't be the same. The curse didn't dictate his life anymore. Yet, the feeling remained—leaving him unsure as to whether it would ever depart. Whether *he* wanted it to depart. Although it was doused in pain and a reminder of an unfair death, it was, as he said, *familiar*.

"I could dye it if you wanted," Techno offered, derailing Tommy's thoughts. "Bleach it back to blonde."

The patch of hair tinted to white weighted down against his head. Death wasn't something quickly disregarded.

He shook his head. "No, no she brought me back like this. It should stay."

"Who's 'she'?" Wilbur asked as his hands left Tommy's face.

He shared a look with Techno before answering, "I'll explain it to you later with Phil."

His heart stopped.

Phil.

How could he forget about the man who he wished had raised him instead of the dark corners of orphanages and foster homes? The one who stood up for him in parent's evening, believed *him* over the harsh words of teachers and did more for him than any father figure had.

"Where is he?" he asked.

"I told him to go to bed last time I saw him," Techno said.

Phil probably wasn't asleep—sleep didn't come easy to those mourning a son.

"What if I dress up as a ghost and wake Phil up?" Tommy suggested, wanting this day to be more joyful, rather than teary hugs and emotionally exhausting reunions. But he knew the answer before it was spoken.

"No."

"Why not?" he complained. As much as he wanted to treat his resurrection like the punchline to a joke, it couldn't be like that. For them, Tommy's death meant more than just a simple revival.

"You've traumatised the man enough," Techno said light-heartedly. Yet, there was a cruel reality to his words.

"Fair point," he shrugged off the conversation and made his way up the stairs. The sooner Phil knew he was alive, the better. The shaking in his hands and hammering of his heart could wait.

He knocked on the door and regretted it the moment his knuckles touched the wood. He didn't want to see Phil's face, the red in his eyes and exhaustion in his spirit. He didn't want to see what *he* did to Phil—how he destroyed the man.

Tommy pushed the door open and a crumpled figure laid under the covers on the bed. The lights were off.

"Phil?" he called out, his voice quivered.

A noise came from the figure on the bed. The covers moved and a head came into view. Phil sat up quickly.

"Tommy?" Phil croaked out in disbelief. The man rubbed his eyes, almost as if he didn't believe Tommy stood there at the door. His breath hitched. "Are you—" his voice broke. "Are you really there?"

Tears quickly returned to his eyes. "Yeah, I am," Tommy whispered with a wistful smile. He dashed to the side of the bed and Phil grabbed his hands, squeezing them to make sure he was actually *here*.

Phil clasped Tommy's hands with his and his bottom lip trembled. "You're back?"

"I'm back," Tommy reassured with teardrops falling onto the collar of his t-shirt. "I'm back for good, Dadza."

The next thing he knew, he was thrown into a hug, heavy arms muffled his sobs into Phil's chest. Phil rubbed his back, not letting his hands leave Tommy, afraid that he would disappear the second he did.

"You've already made me cry too many times in the last twenty-four hours, you have no right to pull this 'Dadza' shit," Phil grunted, though Tommy could feel the smile on his skin.

"Am I not allowed to say that to the man who called me his son?" he said, mischief in his grin and attachment glinting in his eyes. He may mock the words ingrained in his mind, from that letter in his notebook, but it meant the world to him.

"Mate, I swear to God—" Phil's eyes began to water and Tommy gave out a wet laugh.

"I'm waiting for you to go through with that adoption I was promised, big man."

"If you open your mouth one more time as I'm processing you coming back to life, then you can bet I'm ripping up those papers," Phil threatened, yet the softness in his face betrayed his glowering tone.

"We do have a shredder in my shed," Wilbur added.

"Why the fuck is there a—?"

Phil hushed them all. "Can you shut up and let me deal with this?"

“Oh yeah, sorry Phil,” Techno said yet he didn’t sound apologetic in the slightest. “We forgot you need more time with this, y’know due to your age and all.”

“Technoblade I will—”

“You’ll what, old man?” Wilbur interjected, smirking.

“Be glad my arms are currently out of use,” Phil warned as he firmed his grip on Tommy.

“Beltza.”

“Wilbur!”

Tommy beamed as the conversation bloomed and thrived between them. This was what he wanted to return to, not to dreary eyes and stuffed noses, or urns filled with his ashes. He wanted his family back, their easy-going arguments and insults, their teasing and laughter—and that was what he got.

Out of all the birthdays Tommy has had over the years, this one was probably the best. It wasn’t because of how much money was spent or how many gifts he was ‘given’—like with the family vloggers in his last home—but having Wilbur be pissed off for the entire day because of his Marvel-themed cake was the funniest shit.

For some reason, Wilbur absolutely *detested* the Marvel franchise and the uneaten Spider-Man cake currently sitting on the man’s plate made his hatred very apparent.

“What did Spider-Man do to you?”

“You better not go on another rant about the flaws of the Marvel Cinematic Universe,” Techno warned as he scraped the icing off his cupcake.

Wilbur took another sip of his probably alcoholic drink, refusing to speak. Despite how the man was going to be entering his twenties later this year, he sure acted like a child—even more so than Tommy.

It had been Wilbur to remind everyone that even though Tommy’s birthday had passed, he never got to celebrate it—and now he was sulking. The evening had started awkward, of Phil not sure how to commence a birthday that had been abruptly neglected due to the birthday boy’s death, but slowly, everyone eased into it. All it took was Wilbur putting on one of his Spotify playlists, Techno sticking the banners around the house in the most inconvenient and inappropriate places (like a toilet seat, for instance), and Niki preparing the cake—since no one trusted neither Ranboo nor Tubbo with knives.

Now, everyone was scattered around the living room, mixed between the dining tables, sofas and floor.

As yet *another* ‘Los Campesinos!’ song played through the speakers, Phil pushed a wrapped box in front of Tommy. He stared down at it. A part of him was still in disbelief that he had a family that didn’t profit off his birthday or Christmas. He would never get used to this feeling.

“Open it,” Phil said, gesturing to the gift.

He tore the wrapping off and opened the box. In his hands laid a pastel blue hoodie with red Minecraft hardcore hearts printed on the front. Philza Minecraft merch.

“Phil, what you’ve essentially done is branded me,” Tommy said as he unfolded the sleeves.

“No, don’t say that!” Phil proclaimed, gaping at his casual tone.

“Why? You put your brand on me, you’ve forced me to become a walking advertisement for your merch,” he said.

“Just put on the fucking hoodie,” Phil sighed, sounding irritated yet amused. Tommy slotted the hoodie over his head and fit his arms through the sleeves. He liked the colour—the fact that this was practically a brand deal could slide because of how soft it was. Yet, the hoodie being a gift from Phil majorly contributed to the comfortability of the clothing. It felt homely, reminding him of Phil’s side hugs and pats on his shoulder.

“Jesus Christ, you’re so demanding,” Tommy teased as he rubbed out the creases. He paused and gasped, “Wait, am I technically Jesus Christ now?”

“No, it didn’t take you three days to come back,” Techno inputted.

“So that means I’m better than Jesus.”

Phil pinched the bridge of his nose. “What? No—”

“He took longer than me.”

“That’s not how it works—”

“You’re fighting a losing battle, Phil,” Techno said with a hint of a grin. “Just accept defeat.”

“Will one of you shits give Tommy his present so he stops going on about Jesus?” Phil snapped with no heat.

Wilbur took this as his cue to throw a small case at Tommy. After he flipped Wilbur off for hitting his face with the case, he zipped it open. A dark blue ukulele was inside.

“I have no idea how to play this,” Tommy said quietly, anxious to pluck any of the strings in case it broke.

Wilbur laughed and reached over to strum a chord. “I’ll teach you,” he promised, smiling. “Then next is the guitar.”

His cheeks reddened. He ignored the part of him that internally screamed at this, the gift appeased that side of him that desperately wanted to follow in Wilbur’s footsteps and copy anything the older man did.

“Does this mean I can become a member of your band?”

“No,” Wilbur said immediately but paused at the exaggerated pout on Tommy’s face. “Well, maybe if you learn the trumpet.”

“What kind of low-life learns the trumpet?” he grumbled.

“Niki.”

Tommy’s eyes widened. “Please do not tell her I called her a low-life.”

Techno from beside them huffed loudly and placed an envelope in Tommy’s lap. “Open that before you deepen the hole you’re currently digging yourself into.”

With his face flushed, Tommy ripped into the envelope, expecting something like a scratch card or customised Moonpig card probably taking the piss out of him (knowing Techno). But instead, it was a bunch of papers, similar to the ones Tommy gave Techno for Christmas about Steve the polar bear.

He gawked at the text he read. Techno had sponsored a spider for Tommy.

“His name is—”

“Shroud,” Tommy interrupted, already renaming the creature.

“Um, sure.”

“You got him a fucking spider?” Wilbur said after he snatched the papers out of Tommy’s hands.

“Less effort than having to teach *him* how to play an instrument,” Techno shrugged.

Tommy didn’t know if he should be offended at that or not.

Ranboo picked up the TV remote, and spoke with impatience, “Can we play Wii bowling now?”

“Wait until I’m done with my presents, you dickheads. I literally died, give me some respect.”

“You’re milking it at this point,” Tubbo said.

“Shut the fuck up, I’m on my Jesus arc.”

“Stop going on about Jesus, Tommy!” Phil reprehended, his hand rubbing the wrinkles on his forehead—creases he was sure that developed solely from having to deal with Tommy.

Niki walked back into the room from the bathroom, frowning at the guilty look on Tommy’s face and glee practically written over Wilbur’s.

“Wilbur if you fucking tell her what I said—”

“Tommy said—”

“Boys!” Phil shouted, stopping them both from threatening and snitching on each other.

Sitting back down on the sofa, Niki shook her head, not interested in whatever the fuck was going on between the two of them. She reached into her bag and pulled out a package with Christmas wrapping on it. They had run out of birthday paper.

“I don’t want to know what you’re talking about, so here.” She passed Tommy the package, still confused over how red Tommy’s face was.

He scowled down at the item in his hands. A notebook. Yet it was different to the one that had followed him for centuries, the notebook that hadn’t come back to the living with him after his resurrection. It hurt when he realised the notebook wasn’t by his side, despite it serving as a cruel reminder of his curse, he had grown attached to the bookmarks, scribbles in the corners of the page and leather wrapping. Though, this notebook was more modern than his last, with how it was bright yellow and had a metal latch to keep it secure. His name was spelt on the front with those childish stickers you normally stick on their bedroom door.

“I figured you’d need a new one,” Niki said softly. He turned it around and noticed that the price tag was still on it. “Ignore that,” she joked.

His lips thinned, not sure how to react. This gift, something so insignificant in the grand means of things, meant *everything*. It established that this was a new start, that his curse of binding had been broken, with its replacement being a gift from someone he cared about.

“Thank you,” he whispered as his fingers brushed along the stickers.

“You’re welcome,” she replied with a small smile.

The rounds of Wii bowling ended pretty nicely if Tommy was being honest. And by that, he *wasn’t* referring to how he accidentally threw the Wii remote at the TV screen, cracking the corner of it, because he refused to wear the wristband.

But hey, he got into the hundred club on the leader board and Wilbur couldn’t continue his go before the last game ended, so that was a plus. (This was ignoring how Wilbur promptly smacked the shit out of Tommy with a pillow as soon as this happened—the bruise on his elbow took a week to fade).

Nevertheless, as he fell asleep on the sofa in his new pastel blue hoodie with his head resting on Phil's shoulder, he'd say his sixteenth birthday was a success.

He couldn't move when he woke up. His eyes opened, seeping in nothing but shadows. His arms stuck by his side, his legs wouldn't lift from the mattress.

A whimper escaped the gap between his parched lips as his chest pounded, heaving up and down at an alarming beat.

It was all black. The same shades of the void, of the place he *shouldn't* be in.

The curse had been broken, he no longer had a myth controlling his life and a guess he needed to make. But that didn't stop the irrationality fuelling his panic, the part of his mind that disregarded the outlines of his closet in front of him and the fuzzy bedsheets against his exposed skin.

What if this day had been a figment of his imagination, a cruel visualisation of his deepest desires? It scared him that these thoughts existed, that he feared whether he was really revived or that Kristin was the Goddess of Death. Dream *could* have let him die and be reborn, making him no longer Tommy Craft and not even Tommy Idelle.

Just a Tommy from nowhere.

Wetness travelled down his face, dripping down his cheeks, and he couldn't even move his arm to wipe it. He was stuck and afraid—helpless to the force that wouldn't let him scream out Phil's name, to be saved and comforted from the shadows too similar to the void.

But then the smell hit him. Pancakes. Followed by the smoke alarm in the kitchen going off. Wilbur's playlist blaring over the alarm, Phil shouting at him to open his windows and Techno laughing from afar.

This wasn't fake, this wasn't a dream. He was real and alive.

His hands tingled at the same rate as his heaving chest. With each piercing breathe, his limbs loosened from the force. Tears still slid across his face, wetting his pillows, but he could *move*.

Bench trio:

Tommy: please tell me I'm alive

Tubbo: ye, jesus bro

Ranboo: You are alive and safe, Tommy. We just saw you yesterday and celebrated your birthday. It is 9:00am and your family are probably awake. Physical reassurance might be better for you.

You can call us if you need to!

He exhaled sharply. He was okay, he was fine. That was just a nightmare, sleep paralysis or *something*. Something he could handle, he could do this.

Tommy sat up and winced as his back hit his headboard. He rubbed his eyes and stilled at what he saw. Gold blood trickled from his fisted palms.

No, no it wasn't supposed to be gold. Gold meant he was still cursed. He was supposed to be free, human, no longer bound to the curse of immortality and myths—

He blinked and the blood turned red.

It was never gold.

A sob wracked his chest. He couldn't do this. He could handle living when cursed—very poorly, but still, he *lived* through it—but this... He didn't know how to live when the tattoo on his left wrist, the stain of Zagreus, meant *nothing*. It was all he had, his identity and purpose. And now it was gone.

Who even was he without Dream picking everything for him? Who was he underneath all the past names and lives he had lived? It scared him that he didn't have an answer.

Knocking came from the door and his sobbing worsened. He curled inwards. Each broken attempt to breathe rocked against his legs.

The light entered the room with the push of the door. Tommy flinched and tucked further into himself. A part of him didn't trust the light, as he was so used to the darkness and void, but he didn't trust that either. He didn't even trust himself.

Hands so similar to the ghost of his dead brother's brushed along his. Shaking, he untucked his head and recoiled at the sight of Wilbur. He had forgotten that the living version of that ghost lived in the same home as him.

A calming hum echoed the room, a tune of one of the songs Tommy had previously begged to hear on boring days and sleepless nights. His breathing slowly fell in time to Wilbur's, his legs still trembling.

"You okay now?" Wilbur asked, hesitant and devoid of what made him the brother he loved. He sounded the same but behaved weirdly.

He didn't answer him. This entire thing had opened up another problem. Something else to keep him up at night.

Even as Wilbur comforted him, Tommy noticed the differences in the man. Wilbur looked at him differently, eyes not as dark as his prior self but not as amber as they were on the first day he appeared on the Craft's doorstep. A middle ground between the warped darkness and naïve light; a limbo of oak brown. Then there were the downcast movements on his face, how his lips twisted at the corners, almost with guilt, and the furrowing of his brows that were too wrenched to be just an expression.

He thought it was because of the circumstances, of *dying* in the man's arms. But something told him it was different. The change in Wilbur was because of fear, but not provoked fear from that, rather fear caused by himself.

"What's wrong?" Tommy asked.

Wilbur bit his lip until it bled and fiddled with his hands.

"It seems we suffer from the same problem now," Wilbur said with a dry chuckle, deprived of humour and sense. He gazed down at Tommy; his eyes filled with dread. "I can't look at you without seeing that little boy I hurt in the ravine."

Tommy flinched. W. Soot had Wilbur gripped tightly, like strings to a puppet, a pawn to a board. There must be so much pain inside his older brother's head, a constant wager between himself and memories attached to who he used to be—from the lives he shared with Tommy and others he did not.

"I wanted to be a better father to you than Dad was, and I..." Wilbur trailed off and sniffed. His eyes fluttered shut as he rested his forehead against Tommy's. "I'm sorry."

He leaned closer and grasped onto Wilbur's sleeve. "You're not him," Tommy whispered, meaning each word he said. "And even if you end up remembering every single memory, you are not him."

Wilbur hesitated. Tommy straightened his back and sighed, peering at the man that was everything to him. He didn't care if the one who hurt him was hidden inside of Wilbur. He wasn't that person; he wasn't W. Soot. But it was just up to Wilbur to see that.

He gnawed on his inner cheek. He needed to prove it to him.

Before he could stop himself, Tommy grabbed Wilbur's hands and forced them around his own throat. "Do it," he hissed, squeezing Wilbur's hands so they wouldn't leave his neck. "Strangle me."

Wilbur made a noise of distress and fought against him. "Tommy, no, what—?"

"Fucking do it," he spat. "Don't you remember the time you strangled me in that ravine just because I kept rearranging your stuff and messing around, like a child my age *should*?" Wilbur kept trying to take his hands away but to no avail. "You pinned me to a wall and watched my face turn blue. And you laughed. You laughed as I begged for you to let go, screamed that I couldn't breathe, that I was going to *die*."

“Tommy stop!”

Wilbur ripped his hands off him. The amber in his eyes returned, though it was soaked in a different type of fear. He was scared, scared of *Tommy*.

He knew his actions were extreme, but it was necessary.

“My brother, the man in that ravine and person he ended up becoming, wouldn’t have hesitated,” Tommy consoled, his throat strained. He stared at Wilbur. “You are and never will be him.”

A tense silence troubled the room. Neither of the two was sure on what to do, on how to get past whatever had just happened.

“You need to get help for this, Will.”

“Only if you do too,” Wilbur quickly replied. It was oddly reminiscent of that night on the graveyard bench, an initial agreement for therapy at the other’s involuntary expense. But Tommy did need help.

“You love pulling that card, don’t you?” he rolled his eyes but agreed, nonetheless. “Tell your therapist about the memories, no matter how much you fabricate or twist, tell him that you’re conflicted over your identity.”

“What if I get put on meds?”

“Then we’ll flush them together,” he reassured. “You just need his advice, Wilbur. I’m not letting you go through this alone.”

“I could say the same to you,” Wilbur muttered, glaring down at Tommy’s hands, the hands that were just seconds ago used to strangle himself.

“I know I’m not alone in this,” Tommy said, gently threading their fingers together. “My problem is being able to let others *in* on my problems to solve them.”

“At least you’re self-aware,” Wilbur attempted to joke. He sighed and separated their hands. “Come on, Techno is making breakfast after my failed attempt at pancakes.”

“That’s even worse, he’s gonna give us food in the form of potatoes,” Tommy whined airily, as if minutes ago he wasn’t shaking, tucked tightly hugging his knees whilst he sobbed. “Potato waffles or some shit.”

“Don’t give him any ideas.” Wilbur got up and opened the bedroom door. “Just be glad you weren’t here when he went through his farming phase.”

Contrary to Tommy’s concerns, Techno had made a full English breakfast for everyone—with help from mostly Phil and then Wilbur (the fucker was only trusted to make toast, which he thankfully didn’t burn this time). Though, there were still potatoes on Techno’s plate.

As Tommy ate his bacon, he kept catching Techno staring at the Thanatos tattoo on his right wrist. He looked up and the two partook in a silent conversation mainly comprised of, ‘This is something we need to talk about’, and ‘Shut the fuck up and let me eat my food’. Two very *valid* arguments.

He didn’t want to bring it up right now when the taste of death was too familiar on his tongue. It had only been a day.

“Tommy wants to tell you guys something,” Techno blurted out, his voice still monotone and dead-panned despite his quick speech.

Stabbing his fork violently into his bacon, Tommy glared at him, hating the curiosity and apprehension on Phil and Wilbur’s faces.

“You are such a prick,” he cursed under his breath before clearing his throat. “Um, but yeah, I do.”

Phil pushed his cutlery to the side whilst Wilbur took a sip of his coffee, both were obviously impatient and worried for whatever would come out of Tommy’s mouth and his stalling of this needed conversation didn’t help.

He didn’t know how to start it. How do you tell a husband and son that their wife and mother wasn’t technically dead? That the woman you mourned and destroyed yourselves over wasn’t residing in that graveyard, surrounded by empty neighbouring graves, and instead was the Goddess of Death? It was impossible for this to go well.

“I saw Kristin when I was dead,” was what Tommy went with. His heart pounded as silence filled the dining table. No more homely energy bounced off each family member. A tense stillness took its place.

“...what?” Wilbur bit out, his face screwed up in uncertainty and wariness.

“She was the one who brought me back to life,” he continued, wincing internally at every word.

Phil opened his mouth to speak but whatever he was going to say died on his tongue. Tommy gulped, his hands shaking underneath the table. No person should have to tell the people they love *this*. It felt like he was responsible for every spec of pain that flashed over Wilbur and the distress settled in Phil’s throat. *He* brought this upon them, his words and revelations.

There was bliss in ignorance, in being oblivious to the truth of the world and the reality of a family member’s ‘death’. But they deserved to know, he should finish off what Kristin started with her untimed departure. It didn’t stop it from hurting him with every rigid pause that followed.

“Kristin kept something from you,” Techno added, glancing at Phil and Wilbur with guarded eyes. “She’s the Goddess of Death, taker of souls and reaper of life.”

Something flickered across Phil's face, maybe a gesture of realisation, a daunting recall of everything that just *didn't* make sense with Kristin—her absent look on life, the ravens that never left her sight, the days she came back from 'work' appearing more drained than a human should be, her confusing words and chilling goodbye on the hospital bed.

"So she's alive?" Wilbur asked, quiet in his anger. There was an essence submerging him, a livid belief that he had been *wronged* by his mother.

Techno arched his shoulders, discomfort expressed in his posture. "No," he said shortly. "But she's not dead either." Techno paused for Wilbur to process his words, for his rage to distil before he continued. "She is Death, and death is everywhere. Always creeping over your shoulder, checking up on your every move, just *waiting*."

The ambiguity of Techno's speech more confused Wilbur than angered him. All that he had believed had been flipped. His mother, the one who stroked his cheek and embraced him close, the woman who clapped the loudest whenever he performed those nursery rhymes on the piano and whose laughter radiated the most warmth, wasn't *dead*. His entire adolescence had been moulded by this death, it had paved roads of self-destruction and sabotage, consisting of Wilbur pumping *anything* into his system just feel something other than the grief wrecking his spirit.

And for nothing.

She wasn't dead, she wasn't in that grave he visited daily during the first months of her death. She may have heard his cries for her to come back and done absolutely nothing to make it possible. What Goddess doesn't have the power to send some sort of message to their grieving son?

"Wilbur?" Tommy said, scared of his silence.

"What does that make me?" Wilbur asked, hurt tainting his voice. "If she's a Goddess and my *mother*, then..." he trailed off, his head covered. "Is that why I'm remembering?"

Tommy froze in his seat. Dream had been surprised when he told him that Wilbur was remembering, said that it shouldn't be happening. But Wilbur wasn't human, or at least, *fully* human. Maybe only a child of Death could house a reincarnated soul with as much darkness and murder infused inside. Death herself existed before the first drops of water streamed into the Lethe, before the Underworld became what it was now.

Remembering something that thrived on death and the spilt blood of innocents seemed inevitable.

No one dared to answer to him.

Wilbur scoffed, "This is all her fault then."

Phil leaned forward, breaking his silence with a disagreeing grunt. "Kristin loved us, Wilbur. She didn't mean for any of this to happen to you and probably didn't tell us for a reason," he said. Though, there were splinters in his voice, almost as if he didn't believe it himself.

“She left us, Dad!” Wilbur exclaimed, his voice rising. “She doesn’t love us—”

Tommy’s Thanatos tattoo stung, piercing his flesh and throbbing against his layers of skin. He gripped it tightly, wincing as it pulsed, only to hear *her* voice as he did. He recoiled back into his chair, shocked.

“Come here,” Tommy ordered, interrupting them. He raised his arm over the table. “Both of you, touch it.” Neither of them moved. “Now,” he snapped.

With another scoff, Wilbur leaned forward and pressed the palm of his hand over the tattoo; Phil quickly copied him.

Tears sprung to both of their eyes as they listened to her voice, absorbed words Tommy himself could not hear, but felt. Phil’s chest relaxed, no longer on the brink of panic, a smile twinged in sadness and unforgotten love upturned his mouth.

As Wilbur brought his hand back to his side, the anger in his eyes died. He sniffed and brushed against Phil, hesitating before throwing his arms around his father and crying into his shoulder. Phil hushed his son, whispering reassurances and affection he desperately clung to.

Techno stood up and clasped Tommy’s shoulder, offering simple support that Tommy needed the most. He squeezed his shoulder. “We did the right thing,” Techno whispered. “They needed to know.”

He nodded but it didn’t make the pit in his stomach any less heavy.

“What did she say to you?” Techno asked, hovering over Tommy’s Thanatos tattoo. He had only seen Techno hesitate or show any measures of fear twice, the first being before his fencing tournament and the second with his late myth. But now, it was there—subtle but present.

“She said thank you,” he replied, recalling Kristin’s sweet and remorseful tone, one that fluttered so lightly yet fell the hardest. “*Thank you for doing something I could not,*” he quoted, looking up at Techno with open eyes.

He pushed his arm closer to Techno, nodding at him as Techno finally connected his hand to the tattoo. Rather than tears pricking in the corners of his eyes or sadness deepening the crestfallen creases around his mouth, Techno *laughed*. A hearty and light laugh, more high-pitched than Tommy expected.

“An inside joke,” Techno explained, noticing Tommy’s confusion. He released his hand from Tommy’s wrist, satisfied.

Tommy narrowed his eyes. “Oh, so I get the depressing stuff and you get a fucking joke?” he complained. “This is biased.”

“It’s not my fault I’m Kristin’s favourite,” Techno said, smirking.

Tommy rolled his eyes but resigned the insults flowing through his head. He looked over at Phil and Wilbur, heart-clenching at their tight hug, one that hadn’t loosened. “What do we do

with them?”

“Leave them,” Techno answered. “Let’s go on a walk or something.”

He gestured to his plate of food as Techno walked towards the front door. “But my bacon will get cold—”

“Tommy!” Techno called and he sighed, snatching a piece of bacon before joining him.

He still had a week until Easter break was over and he actually had to do his GCSEs, but with that in mind, he didn’t spend one minute of his break revising or God forbid, doing *work*. Instead of memorising mathematic equations or ways Charles Dickens used lists to emphasise fuck-all in one of his novellas, Tommy sat in the front seat of the car as Phil drove him and Wilbur to therapy.

The session was very much needed, especially after the shit-fest that occurred because of Kristin’s revelation. Plus, Tommy missed Puffy.

“So, have you decided what you’ll tell him?” Phil asked Wilbur as the three entered the building. Tommy had told Phil about his idea of Wilbur telling his therapist about having memories that didn’t belong to him, which Phil agreed with.

“Nope,” Wilbur said, trying to remain careless but his nerves were obvious. “I’ll just wing it and if I get misdiagnosed with some type of hallucinogenic or personality disorder, I’m blaming Tommy.”

He flipped Wilbur off before knocking on Puffy’s door and running inside as soon as it opened.

Puffy chuckled at his keenness. She looked like she normally did, with her old-fashioned outfits oddly suggestive to a pirate. The only difference was the red lipstick on her lips, somehow completing the outdated outfit. He stopped the part of him that wanted to hug her or express his gratitude for her presence and help over the months in their sessions.

He realised on the car ride there that if he wasn’t revived, he would have never been able to thank her at all. At least he had forever to do that now.

“Captain Puffy, I have missed you,” Tommy paraded as he jumped to land on the red bean bag.

“Tommy, I saw you last week.”

“Well, I feel like I’ve died and come back to life in that time,” he said, grinning to himself.

She gave him a look, an expression that appeared very frequently in their sessions—it was a mix of, ‘What the fuck is this child going on about?’ and ‘He’s very sweet’. He didn’t know if that was correct, but since he said it, now it was true.

“Speaking of last week,” she began and his mood soured, “do you feel any better now?”

The last time he was here, he barely remembered any of it. It phased through him—how he sat secluded in his head as Puffy questioned about the problems they previously discussed, with associating Wilbur with someone else, with W. Soot.

He gulped, unsure if he *was* better. He had accepted that Wilbur wasn’t his first brother, that the man who hurt him at his lowest and hurt so many more people after his Prometheus death was someone else. Despite the memories that may be recalled, Wilbur was someone he trusted with his entire chest and loved even more so. They were separate entities.

“I spoke to Wilbur about the problem I had,” he said, hesitant to speak. “We’re dealing with it.”

Puffy opened her mini-fridge and passed him a can of coke, a familiar act that brought more comfort than it should have. “That doesn’t answer my question, Tommy.”

He glared down at the red of the coke can and sighed.

“I will get better,” he decided. “Someday I will heal and be able to look at certain things without thinking of Theseus.” Tommy paused and tried to stop the shaking in his leg. “I’ll be okay.”

“And I’ll be here for that day,” Puffy said kindly with a smile only the sun could envy.

“Yeah,” he agreed, relishing in her smile, “yeah, you will.”

On the final day of Easter break, Tommy managed to convince Tubbo and Ranboo to go out to town with him. It took a lot to convince Ranboo, who kept giving excuses like, ‘My entire future in higher education is dependent on this exam I have next week, Tommy’ and, ‘Please let me revise physics’. Bullshit excuses, if you ask him, but you really shouldn’t when he hadn’t picked up a textbook since his last history lesson before school ended at the beginning of April.

However, with a simple conversation, both Tubbo and Ranboo were onboard with hanging out that day. Sure, it was emotionally manipulative and immoral, but it was for the greater good.

The conversation started with good intentions, just Tommy bringing up the idea he had for them to experience the last day before exam season started together, having fun and oblivious

to the future stress on their shoulders. Yet as soon as Ranboo seemed hesitant, he spiked up the persuasion level. His words still came from a place of truth, of love and fondness. That didn't stop him from exaggerating the fuck out of it though.

"This will be the only life I have left," Tommy had begun as he laid on Tubbo's bed, his eyes focused on the star constellations painted on his ceiling. The patterns detailing myths that he doesn't need to worry about anymore. "I'll finally be able to die," he continued quietly. "I just want to record my teenage years with you guys and still be here to look back on it."

"And that means I *have* to sacrifice last minute revision for you?" Ranboo asked, hating the pout on Tommy's lips and pleading in his eyes. If it was Tubbo that needed convincing, this wouldn't have sold him—the pitying display Tommy always resorted to never worked on Tubbo. For Tubbo, just give him a skateboard and he'd happily go along with anything you suggested. With Ranboo, it was very easy.

Tommy sat up, tilting his head at Ranboo. "I want to document it all," he stated with confidence, gripping the phone in his hand. "I want to experience it all with you guys."

Ranboo sighed and closed his textbook, resignation appeared on his face. "Fine."

He jumped to his feet, grinning so widely that his cheeks ached, and tugged both of them out of the house. "Let's vlog some shit, boys."

And now they stood in the town centre, Tubbo's face red with embarrassment, Ranboo behind the camera and Tommy *mildly* harassing random people on the street.

"Think about it, when your future kids ask what your youth was like, you can show them this video and they'll finally respect the elderly," Tommy said as the three quickly walked away from a group of teenagers that cussed them out.

Ranboo groaned, glad his mask and glasses covered his flushed face. "Nothing says respect me more by bothering random people on the street with WikiHow instructions."

"Exactly!" he proclaimed cheerfully. "See Tubbo, Ranboo gets it."

"I get it, but I don't want it," Tubbo said, already wanting this trip to the town to end. But the grin on Tommy's face made it worth it—but he swore to God if Tommy asked another pair of nans if they knew who Philza Minecraft was, he would walk home.

"Come on, let's try to sneak into a bar," Tommy suggested. "Ranboo's tall enough to pass for an eighteen-year-old."

Ranboo hid his masked face in his hands. "Oh God no, mercy please."

It was safe to say that their plan didn't work out—but it did make an entertaining video.

Ranboo eventually went home so he could go over his flashcards and notes for tomorrow, leaving Tommy and Tubbo sitting on a bench with sausage rolls from Greggs. The two talked

for hours, ranging from varying topics about why CS:GO players deserved less (that was mostly Tommy ranting and Tubbo disagreeing with every word) to the politics in ‘Stardew Valley’. That was until Tubbo asked something different.

“How’s the whole adoption thing going?”

Tommy frowned. “How do you know about that?”

“Phil brought it up with Ranboo and I ages ago, asking if we believed you’d actually *want* to be adopted by him,” Tubbo explained as he ate his sausage roll. “We told him it was a stupid question because the answer was obvious.”

Tommy’s cheeks tinted red.

He cleared his throat and took a sip of his drink, suddenly embarrassed. He didn’t think his... attachment to the Crafts was *that* obvious.

“Phil told me they’re finally finished with the application form and it’s next to the whole law side of it,” he explained, recalling the stacks of papers that were scattered across Phil’s office desk. “It was a quick application since I don’t need my biological parent’s consent for the adoption.”

“Why didn’t your biological parents say anything about the adoption then?” Tubbo asked.

Tommy gave him a look, waiting for him to realise what he had said, but Tubbo just stared at him confused.

“Tubbo, they left me on the side of the road next to an orphanage when I was six months old.”

“Oh,” Tubbo exhaled quietly. “At least it’s better than being left in a box.”

“What?”

“Y’know,” Tubbo said, using his hands to make the shape of a square, “a box.”

“Were you left in a box?”

“No.”

Tommy scowled at him, bewildered by this entire conversation. “Then why bring it up?”

“Felt like it.”

A silence followed until both of the boys burst out laughing. Their shoulders brushed together as they heaved forward. It wasn’t as funny as it should have been but just being next to each other made the moment more enjoyable. Tommy smiled, knowing that they’d be years of moments like this now, bizarre and intimate conversations with comfortable pauses and blaring laughter. He could one day move into a house with Tubbo and Ranboo, maybe by the sea and in the outskirts of a city. Be by Tubbo’s side as he eventually hacked into the

American government's databases and by Ranboo's when he finally got over his fear of ordering food over the phone. For once, Tommy wanted time to move faster so he could get to that point.

The wind picked up and Tommy pulled his coat closer around him, the movement tugged down his sleeves, covering up the Zagreus tattoo. He still needed to discuss that with Tubbo, about the whole Tobias thing and him being Timmy. But he couldn't stomach it. How would you tell your best friend that their great-grandfather was his former best friend who both ran through flowers fields with him and exiled him from their dying country? It wasn't something you could just randomly bring up. Well—

"Tubbo, I'm Timmy," he announced bluntly, channelling all impulsivity he had.

"Huh?" Tubbo said as lettuce fell from his mouth. Perhaps he shouldn't have blurted that out when Tubbo was mid-bite into his sandwich.

He sighed and faced him. "Y'know in the L'Manberg history books how Timmy is W. Soot's younger brother? I'm him. That was my first life, he was my Theseus."

Gusts of wind filled the awkward silence—of Tubbo processing his words and Tommy burying his trembling hands into his coat pockets. He bit his lip, anxious of Tubbo's response. He couldn't stop the thoughts that maybe Tubbo wouldn't believe him, maybe this would be when his best friend finally has had enough of his shit, of his perceived lies and annoying endeavours. He didn't want this to be true but the impassive expression on Tubbo's face didn't help.

But what he didn't expect to come out of Tubbo's mouth was, "Holy fuck you are *old*."

He sat up, offended. "What the hell? No, I'm not!"

"You were born in 1509, you are ancient, even older than Phil and that's not something to be proud of."

Tommy smacked Tubbo's arm, a grin creeping onto his lips as Tubbo laughed. He had nothing to worry about.

Eventually, they calmed down and Tubbo stopped making fun of his age.

"So is that why you hated history class?" Tubbo asked.

He nodded. "It's not fun learning about how historians hate me," he said.

Having to even read those articles was hell—how Timmy was the reason L'Manberg fell so soon, why war was inevitable and death came quickly to innocent lands. If it were years earlier or in another life where the Crafts didn't foster him, that would have ruined him. Even with family and friends who didn't treat him like shit, it *hurt*. He was a child back then, younger than he was now and more naïve and impulsive, susceptible to all types of manipulation and violence. He didn't want wars to rip his family and country apart, to destroy any relationships he once held close to his heart and *kill* him.

“You didn’t deserve it, by the way,” Tubbo said, placing his hand over Tommy’s arm, gripping the thick fleece of his coat. “Being exiled and killed... you didn’t deserve any of it.”

“I know,” he whispered with a sad yet wistful smile.

“Was my great-grandfather as much of a little bitch as my mum made him out to be?” he asked, more light-hearted than his other question.

Tommy chuckled and shook his head. “He wasn’t *that* bad, Tubbo,” he answered. “He might have been a failing President and shitty friend at the end of his life when I was still there, but there was always kindness inside him. He knew that a country needed to be prioritised before a best friend, that tough choices were ahead of him, that there was still good in people.”

“Eh, he would have been cooler if he made nukes,” Tubbo stated, shrugging.

“Of course *you’d* say that.”

A part of him saw Tobias in Tubbo, no matter how stupid it sounded. They differed in appearance but so similar in how they acted. Tubbo reminded him of who Tobias *used* to be—a carefree boy, so curious and unexpected, with times when you didn’t know what he was going on about but you soaked in every single word, whether it was about the intricacies of coding or redstone in Minecraft, you *listened*. Because you cared. He was so easy to care about, to love and cherish.

He tugged on the green bandana around his neck and his lips twitched. Tobias and Tommy had shared cloths at one point in their childhood, before the conflict and terror, before morality and responsibility murdered them.

Tommy glanced over at the unfinished sandwich sitting on the bench and back at Tubbo, who still had lettuce hanging from the corner of his mouth. He was glad *this* was the life the curse had been broken in. He could do this once more, not necessarily replacing his failed friendship with Tobias with Tubbo, but just simply... trying again.

The second after he wished Ranboo good luck for his first exam, left watching as he walked into the hall, a body slammed into him. It was Clementine.

“Tommy!” she shouted, bits of her hair flying in her face. “Tommy, my saving grace, the only man ever to walk this Earth, the greatest—”

“What do you want from me?” he interrupted, grinning. Clementine only did this when she needed something from him, he knew this because he did exactly the same thing to her.

She paused to catch her breath and grabbed onto his arms. “I need you to be my model for my art exam.”

“What?”

“Basically, over Easter term, I had a revelation,” she said, eyes wide. “It makes more sense for my final piece to be based on a man since it’s about the overbearing nature of men in the field of STEM from a perspective of a woman.” He nodded. She had told him all about her coursework in English last term, it was something she had always been irritated about, especially because she wanted to become an engineer. “Vitalia was supposed to be my model but it doesn’t work anymore! So, I need you.”

“What do I get out of it?”

“My eternal gratitude and friendship?”

“Hmm,” he contemplated, “nah, that’s not enough.”

She flicked him on the forehead. “I won’t beat the shit out of you right now if you help me.”

He laughed but instantly stifled it the moment she hit his chest. “Fine! Fine, I’ll be your model.”

“Are you free right now? I need to take the pictures as soon as possible since the first painting session is at the end of the week.”

He looked down at his exam timetable, pointedly ignoring the history exam that was tomorrow which he *should* revise for and shoved it back into his bag. “Yeah, I’m free.”

“Great!”

Even if he was bullied, ridiculed and harassed during the modelling session with Clementine, he did miss her. Though he didn’t miss being forced to sit in a chair for two-hours straight, violently shouted at every time he even moved a *muscle* and manipulated into putting on cat ears. Tommy didn’t know what cat ears had to do with the misogyny in STEM but with how Clementine kept taking more pictures on her phone and laughing at him the entire time, it was obviously a piss-take. He swore to God, if he checked her Instagram later to see any of those pictures on her page, someone’s house was going to have significantly less property worth than it would have had prior.

Regardless, he hoped that after his GCSEs, he’d still stay friends with Clementine. It was normal to lose contact with people once the whole ‘I’m friends with you more because I’m in close-quarters with you every weekday’ no longer applied. But Clementine had sent him *many* pictures of the shrine she created over the moth plushie he had gotten her for her birthday, so that promised a long-lasting friendship.

“What are you doing after secondary school?” she asked him, almost as if she read his thoughts. They had finished with the modelling session, but since neither of them had any

exams today, she bought him some pizza from the canteen and the two stayed in the art room.

He shrugged at her question, not sure. For a while, he thought he'd die before graduating secondary school, so any future career paths or plans in higher education weren't a problem for him to ponder and have existential crises over. But now, it was crisis time.

"I have no idea," he mumbled.

Clementine pushed her drawing aside and moved to sit closer to him. "Let me psychoanalyse you. I'll decide your future."

He blinked at her, stumped. "Clem, what the fuck?"

"Your first instinct was to swear at me so I don't think you should work with children."

"Dude, what are you even—"

"You're questioning everything I say so you'll do well in a male-dominated field."

"Clementine—"

"What about film studies?"

He stopped. Okay, maybe she had a point with that. If he ever directed a Marvel film, it would piss off Wilbur *and* be a cool experience, so there was no losing with that. Plus, he could put on his application about how in the Minos and Pasiphae foster home he was made to edit their vlogs on YouTube which accumulated millions of views and sponsors. Whether or not that was technically trauma-dumping, it did not matter.

"Ranboo is going sixth form I think, and Tubbo found a lower-level apprenticeship," Tommy said, hoping she'd realise why he brought it up.

Clementine frowned, her dark eyes warming. "You don't want to be separated from them, don't you?"

He exhaled sharply, nodding. Even though he knew that going to different schools and doing different things wouldn't break up his friendships with the two of them, there were still doubts he had. That maybe they'd befriend nicer people, guys who wouldn't take advantage of their kindness, girls who wouldn't annoy the fuck out of them with their boisterous laughter and immaturity. He didn't want to be replaced.

"Tommy, no offence but you're dumb as fuck," she said bluntly. "No, don't give me that look, you're being dumb. I don't know Tubbo or Ranboo that well but you guys have something that isn't easily broken. And you're also clingy as fuck, so they won't get away from you easily."

Ignoring the insults included in her words, he thought over them. Sure, he knew his concerns were unreasonable, especially because he loved them and they loved him back. He had

shared things with them that he would tell no one else, he trusted them so much and could never replace either of them.

“Y’know, you’re a good friend,” he said, smiling at her. Despite how she had gotten him grounded because of her party—which was more his fault but he wasn’t one to take responsibility for his own actions—he appreciated her.

“I’m not a good friend,” she refuted with a giggle as she pulled out her phone. “I am literally going to publicly humiliate you later today because there is no way these pictures of you are staying private.”

She turned her phone to show him the image of him with cat ears on and clutched it to her chest when he attempted to snatch it out of her hands. “Clementine! You piece of shit!”

Clementine cackled loudly and pocketed her phone before it could be stolen. “But you said I’m a good friend.”

“I take it back, I hate you.”

Disregarding the mild cyberbullying he received from his friends after she posted those pictures, a piece of him liked how he was permanently on her Instagram page, as if it was a mark of their friendship.

Now, maybe, just maybe, Tommy fucked up with not doing a single minute of revision before his final maths exam. However, he did do ten seconds, but that was just when he had to answer Tubbo about what time the exam would end. He still got the time wrong though.

“Can I borrow a pen?” he asked Ranboo.

“Tommy, we are walking into the exam hall as we speak and you don’t even have a pen,” Ranboo said, exasperated. Despite him having his mask on, Tommy could just tell he was being glared at.

“I don’t have a calculator either but be glad I’m not asking you for that.”

Ranboo face-palmed. “I can’t with you right now,” he muttered as he walked faster to get away from Tommy.

With how his exam went, it would be appropriate to say he won’t be qualifying for maths at A Level (yet he would never do that anyway, he valued his mental health—what little he had left of it). But at least he knew how to rationalise fractions and shade in bar charts. Everything else... not so much.

It was only because his history paper would be exactly after this. Why the fuck did his last ever GCSE exam have to be history of all the subjects?

He spent many hours lying in bed dreading the entire thing. If he dreamt about exile again last night and woke up in a cold sweat with a scream on the tip of his tongue, then no one would ever know if it. He needed to keep this to himself, it was *his* problem to deal with.

He sighed and rubbed his eyes, fighting the sleep in his eyes.

“You alright, man?” Ranboo asked, noticing Tommy’s leg bouncing under the table. They were waiting in the canteen for their seat rows to be called so they could go into the hall for their history exam.

Tommy pushed his leg with his hand. “Yep, totally fine,” he said with gritted teeth.

“Look, it’s only two essays and three smaller questions, you can do this,” Ranboo said.

He rolled his eyes. “Yes, and those questions so happen to be about my first life, where I had to go through too many wars and battles than I should have, lost every person I once loved and got fucking killed by the last person I trusted. So maybe Ranboo this is not something I can just *do*,” he snapped, his lips curled into a snarl.

Ranboo shifted in his seat, his head lowered. Tommy bit his cheek as he regretted his words. His friends didn’t deserve this, having to deal with him when he was like *this*.

“Sorry,” he uttered. “I shouldn’t take this out on you.”

“It’s fine,” Ranboo said.

“No, no it’s not,” he argued, his voice faltered. “You’re trying to help me and I just...”

Ranboo placed a hand on his arm. “It’s fine, Tommy,” he repeated. “Really, it’s fine.”

The people sat next to them got up as a teacher called their row.

“You’re not alone with this, okay?” Ranboo said, gently whilst they followed the others. “As soon as this is over, we’re going straight to Niki’s café, ordering the most expensive hot chocolate and fries we can get, and forgetting Miss Allingham ever existed.”

He unclenched his fist and leaned more into Ranboo’s side as he walked. “Yep, I can do that.”

Yet, this comfort that Ranboo brought to him died as soon as Tommy flicked to the first page of his history exam and read the words ‘exile’ and ‘Dream’. He thought his teacher told him that the debate over if Dream was a hallucination in his exile wouldn’t come up as a separate essay, that there wasn’t enough content to discuss for it to be that long of an answer.

His breathing shortened, matching the thundering in his chest and shaking of his hands. He really didn’t want to do this, to have to debate *that* whilst his Lycomedes with the green of

Dream's eyes and callouses of his hands as he pushed Tommy off that cliff were still engrained in his mind.

A loud cough from his right caught his attention. Ranboo, as soon as he noticed he had Tommy's focus, flipped him off. The shock that disrupted his halting breath, from being flipped off by the one who never swore, the *angel* of the group (Tubbo's nickname for Ranboo, not his) eased the heaving in his chest just a bit.

He bit his lip and picked up his pen. If he was going to have to write about this, he would tear Dream to shreds, correct all the inaccurate information in his textbooks and become the biggest Timmy defender and apologist there ever was.

Despite Tommy's foster father being the literal main developer of Minecraft, therefore making the man *loaded* with Tory money and reduced taxes, Ranboo still persisted that he paid for their meals in the café. Ranboo ignored every attempt Tommy made to pay for their food, including how when he forced the money into the waitresses hand behind the till, Ranboo smacked it away.

The two sat in the corner, slowing eating away at their chips and nachos. As they enjoyed their lunch in peace, Tommy found himself pondering back to that conversation he had with Clementine last month, about his apparent 'stupid and dumb energy' fears about whether school ending would interfere with his friendships with Tubbo and Ranboo.

"Ranboo," he started and instantly regretted speaking. Ranboo perked up and urged him to continue. "Um, well, okay so I have a question," he said, stuttering over his words. "Do you think we'll still be... y'know, friends after school ends?"

A quiet pause rendered between them. Ranboo's lips twitched and he put down his cutlery.

"Where's this coming from?"

"Exams are almost over, at least they're over for me and..." he trailed off, fighting over what to say. He knew what he wanted to say, he wanted to tell him that he didn't want this dynamic to change, for their close bond to break because they don't speak as often because they would go to different schools. He didn't want to let go of him, of either of them. His years living had ingrained many things into him and one of them was that he hated change.

"Do you think we're friends just because we share a couple of classes?" Ranboo asked, his voice tender and low.

"Well no—"

"Do you think I only talk to you when it's about school work?"

"No but—"

"Then why would I stop being friend with you when school ends?" Ranboo said.

Tommy paused and fiddled with his hands under the table. He didn't know—something common with his thoughts and beliefs. They were often fried and irrational, but firm.

"I don't know," he confessed, more upset with himself than anything. He should feel relief that his fears were nothing to be scared about, but this was a common thing, for him to get himself worked up about something and in the end, it was irrelevant.

"When you're in college for film, expect me to be waiting outside of your classroom window at some point," Ranboo said with a grin. "You, me and Tubbo, nothing will get in between us, okay?"

He exhaled lightly, resigning every small disagreement he had irking in his head. He believed him. The future, now that it mattered, was scary, but at least this part of it, the ascension of childhood friendships, was sorted.

"Don't you have your final exam after this weekend?" Tommy asked as he sprinkled more salt onto the chips. Ranboo nodded and Tommy scowled at him. "Then why are you here with me? You should be revising or some shit."

Ranboo sighed and took off his glasses, his face bare and expressing *everything* that flowed through him. "Right now, you're more important to me than any exam."

He shrunk deeper into his chair, his cheeks suddenly warm and ears burning. "Shut up," he grumbled into his hands.

"Would you prefer me to list every detail I dislike about you then?"

"Yes!" he exclaimed, his face still burning.

"Okay, first of all, you act like an only child but you're not even an only child and that makes it even worse—"

"What the fuck is that supposed to mean?" he demanded.

"Case and point," Ranboo stated and laughed when Tommy shoved his arm. "You're only giving me more evidence."

"I literally hate you."

Ranboo grinned at him. "What happened to all those hugs you gave me, Tommy?"

He didn't think it was possible for his face to get redder, but it did. With a glare, Tommy stuffed more chips into his mouth and threw a salt packet at Ranboo.

"Are you feeling okay now?" Ranboo asked him.

Tommy's lips thinned. He should feel worse from having to write about his first life and every traumatic detail for an hour and forty-five minutes, but with Ranboo sitting opposite him with a salt packet laying on his shoulder and eyes creased in open understanding, it wasn't that bad.

“Yeah, I am,” he muttered, an inkling of a smile on his lips. “Though I would feel better if Tubbo were here instead of you—”

“Oh my God, this is only child behaviour,” Ranboo complained.

Tommy giggled and shook his head, in denial of such behaviour. He leaned forward and brushed their knuckles together, a small yet meaningful act, a thank you without words.

Ranboo huffed and reciprocated the movement, dropping his light-hearted glare and scowl. “You get away with too much stuff,” he grumbled.

“And you just let me,” Tommy smirked at Ranboo’s resign. It was true, after all. “Come on, I know you have geography flashcards in your bag. Give them to me, I can help.”

“Do you really want to learn about Brazil and their rocks?” Ranboo asked, sceptical.

“Nope but you have to know this shit, so we’re doing it.”

And with that afternoon, Tommy’s knowledge on Brazil’s roofing strategies and plastic houses grew, and so did the gratitude each of them felt for the other. (It also meant that if Ranboo got a high grade on his geography exam, Tommy would take full credit, but that was a fair exchange).

When Tommy returned home from the café, his room was pitch-black. With the curtains pulled shut and night lamps switched off, the room was nothing but a pit of darkness, devoid of light. A void, you could say. At least that was what Tommy’s head said.

Every day that passed since his revival hardened his fear of the dark. He couldn’t stop the reminding thoughts labelling every black space as the void, as the home of Dream and waiting room with Kristin. It meant that as he rested in his bed at night, a racing heart accompanied him.

His hands trembled as he reached over to switch on the light. Despite how the light had returned, the tightness in his shoulders and cold spikes pinching his skin did not cease. The only thing that could shake him from this *reaction* was Wilbur’s voice. So whenever this happened, he buried himself in his bed covers, put on his earphones and blasted one of Wilbur’s songs, loud enough so no other voices besides the soft vocals and acoustic guitar could be heard. Normally when he resorted to this, no nightmares came, no sleepless nights followed and peaceful nothingness carried on until the morning.

It didn’t work this time.

A mask fractured in every sense stared at him. The painted eyes had cracked through the centre, bleeding in pale green. Half of Dream’s face laid exposed; his jaw, left cheek, scarred

eyebrow and eyes. No humanity emerged from this exposure. Instead, a sinister gleam, one full of hatred and betrayal settled behind that shattered mask.

Tommy remembered the punishment he had told Kristin. But this was not it.

“Dream?” he called out, unstable and hesitant.

The void swallowed him and a masked smile itched closer. Black tears poured down the eye sockets, blood flowed from the cracks. A hand wretched forward, grasping onto Tommy’s arm, pulling him closer.

He shrieked, his body shuddering in fear. The grip around him harshened, twisting into a deathly grasp. But that wasn’t the worst of it. As Dream’s hand squeezed tighter, he felt *everything*. Not just the hand bruising his flesh, but every death since the first. The cliff scraping against his back as Theseus fell, the burns Icarus endured all alone, the piercing guilt Orpheus wallowed in and the weight of his mother’s body, as heavy as Sisyphus’ boulder. Dream’s force propelled him through it all—even being ripped from life only to be put back, the pieces muddled up and stitches out of place.

It was all too much, the pain, the green eyes reminding him of times where that gaze brought comfort and then rounds of torture. He collapsed to the ground until the touch left.

The screams wrecking his throat woke him up before his body did. He clawed at his arms, at where he *swore* he could still feel Dream’s rough grip bruising him. His legs thrashed against his covers, he couldn’t escape it. Even when his curse had been broken, Dream was still here. He would never leave.

The door burst open and Techno flew to his bedside. As whimpers left him a shaking mess, Techno gently approached him, his hair flowing past his shoulders and night-gown untucked. He touched Tommy’s hands and another scream left his throat. He flinched away and scurried backwards until the wall wouldn’t let him anymore. He couldn’t control it—he couldn’t control anything. His body moved without command, his breathing increased despite his chest begging him to calm down.

As his blurred vision narrowed, Techno sat on the side of his bed, at a distance so no part of his body touched Tommy’s. He could hear mutters under the ringing of his ears, parts of speech, Techno’s deep yet stabling voice. Techno continued with his short one-sided conversations, his ramblings of how his day at work in the library went, random facts about fencing and the history of each blade, his secret recipe for potato salad. When the ringing in his ears eventually fled, these conversations kept the voices, the reminders of that nightmare, of Dream’s grip and all it entailed, at bay. Without meaning to, he copied Techno’s breathing as the other spoke slowly.

“Sorry,” Tommy stammered, still shaking. The panic had left his system yet everything else stayed. The fear, the memories, the bleak souvenirs from Dream. It all remained.

Techno rolled his eyes and edged closer to him. “Both you and Wilbur do that,” he began, “you apologise for the most annoying stuff.” Tommy lifted his back from the wall. “It’s a shame I didn’t work out the two of you are technically related just from that.”

“What’s Wilbur apologising for this time?” he asked, hoping to distract himself with something that didn’t centre around him.

Thankfully, Techno picked up on his want for a subject change. “Wilbur’s having nightmares as well.”

“About what?”

“His past lives,” Techno supplied and his face furrowed. Tommy leaned closer. “If I said the name Estella, would that mean anything to you?”

Tommy froze. His shoulder brushed along Techno’s and he recoiled backwards. His breathing began to hasten until Techno calmed him again. *Estella*. That child in the apartment of Wilbur’s life in 1950s America, when he became the terrorist named Willow’s Siren, costing the lives of two-hundred and seventy people. He could still remember Estella’s cries as the building fell on them.

“Is he remembering that?” he croaked, sick to his stomach.

Techno nodded gravely, the same sickness on his face.

“But he has reason to have nightmares, he’s experiencing *that*,” Tommy spat, disgusted at himself. “Mine is just Dream, I—”

“Shut up,” Techno gritted out. “Tommy, you’ve been through so much and you’ve just come back to *life*. It’s bound to have consequences.”

“Is being afraid of the dark an acceptable one? Or am I just being a fucking pussy, scared of everything?” he retorted, his jaw clenched. He hated this, he hated voicing his feelings only to be met with argument. He knew his head messed everything up, that his own thoughts were hypocritical and insensitive to himself. But having to deal with a confrontation over it pissed him off further.

“Who said death was easy, Tommy?” Techno asked, quiet all of a sudden. “Who said you would be completely fine after having to experience death five times, and your fifth time being the most traumatic because you came *back*. You spoke to Death, you heard her words and were revived by her hand. Everything you feel is justified, it’s *allowed*. All of it is allowed, Tommy.”

Tears swelled in his eyes. He lowered his head and laid his hand on the bed, his palm facing upwards. Techno’s gaze flickered between Tommy’s hand and face, and eventually, he placed his own hand in his. A chill jumped at Tommy’s spine but that didn’t stop him from closing his palm shut, with Techno’s intertwined.

“Can you sleep in the chair again tonight?” he whispered, almost embarrassed of his own request. Every shadow in his room nudged at his doubts that maybe Dream wasn’t gone, maybe he was still here to torment him in the void. He didn’t want to be alone right now.

Techno nodded and retrieved his armchair. He tucked Tommy in his own bed and got comfortable in the chair. “You better do my chores for a month after this,” he beckoned. “This chair is hell to sleep on.”

Tommy knew he was exaggerating it and attempted to smile. “I’ll do the washing up and that is it. You still need to do your own bin.”

Ignoring the loud huff that came from Techno, Tommy nestled his head against his pillow and stared at the outline of Techno’s pink hair in the pale darkness.

“Go to sleep, Tommy,” Techno whispered. “I won’t leave.”

“Promise?”

Techno groaned half-heartedly, making Tommy chuckle. “Yes, I promise now shut up and let *me* sleep.”

Knowing Techno would fight off anything to keep him safe, sleep came easy to him.

In the morning, Tommy did not expect to walk downstairs to see some weird man in a suit sitting beside the dining table in *his* seat. Even though the man had a kind face, it did not mean shit—the fucker needed to move.

“Who’s this bitch?” Tommy grumbled, stealing Techno’s coffee when he wasn’t looking and instantly regretting it (he underestimated how many espresso shots Techno put in his morning drink).

Phil bit down his amusement and sighed. Ah, he was in ‘adult mode’, something Tommy only saw when professional adults were in the room. So this seat-stealer was someone important.

“Tommy, this is Sam, our assigned officer from CAFCASS.”

His eyes widened. Oh shit. Okay, maybe he shouldn’t have called one of the key people involved for his adoption to be accepted a ‘bitch’. He didn’t expect a CAFCASS employee to have green highlights in his hair; after all, his teachers kept grilling Clementine that dyed hair was ‘unprofessional’ and an ‘unemployable’ factor. Obviously not the case for Sam.

“Ayup,” Tommy greeted, as awkward as ever.

Sam gave him an as equally as awkward nod and an immediate bond was formed—at least in Tommy’s opinion.

The rest of the morning was filled with Tommy trying to both impress and test the man’s boundaries. He was, after all, the person who was supposed to help them present the case to the court about Tommy’s adoption so he might as well show his true colours to the man. Though, Sam didn’t appreciate the jokes Tommy and Wilbur made about Phil and belting.

You'd think a guy trained in advisory support for adoption from foster care cases would appreciate dark humour. Nonetheless, Sam was cool, but apparently not *that* cool.

Either way, his visit meant that Tommy's adoption would be finalised soon—and that made him happier than he'd ever admit to anyone.

Just as Tommy was about to enter the shower, someone just *happened* to knock on the front door, not only once (which was very easy to ignore), but five times. Then they decided to bring hell on his doorbell. After stomping down each stair to show his frustration, he opened the door, expecting to see some underpaid Amazon deliverer or another Urban Outfitters package—Wilbur hadn't stopped ordering clothes for him from that site for the past month.

But instead, a baby laid at his doorstep.

No, no this wasn't some child acquisition moment. Tommy swore against it. No found family would come from this shit.

He glared down at this baby and its *audacity* to disturb his afternoon. Sighing, he picked them up, cursing himself for even thinking that the way the baby's nose wrinkled at the sudden movement was cute.

Though, all lightness around this entire situation dropped as soon as he noticed something hanging from the baby's neck. From *his* neck.

The amulet that used to drape around Dream's neck.

He loosened the blankets and untucked the baby's arm. His heart hammered as it confirmed his fears. A tattoo of Zagreus inked the baby's tiny wrist. Green eyes, too rounded and light to not be familiar, gazed up at him.

Dream stared at him.

“Kristin you fucking—” he hissed under his breath. *This* was not what he meant by making Dream go through what all the cursed had. He just thought Kristin would make Dream human, an *adult* human, with the curse. Forced to experience the same pain and guessing they all had to for years.

But rebirthing Dream as a fucking *baby*?

Nope, he couldn't deal with this. Baby Dream was another nightmare itself, with how his hand itched towards Tommy's and gripped onto his fingers, only to immediately bring them to his mouth.

Dream, the once-powerful God who killed him in his first life, now was a baby cradled to his chest with Tommy's fingers stuffed into his mouth.

There was only one thing he could do here: make this baby someone else's problem. So, with that in mind, he called up the one person he wholeheartedly believed would deal with this in the best sense and appropriate manner.

"Linda!" he shouted in an amplified manner over the phone. "How are you doing on this fine evening?"

A predictable silence followed by an old and grouchy woman squawking came from the phone, Linda Smith, the only person over the age of sixty who did not deserve a free Oyster card on all buses, was obviously confused and irritated by this call.

"What do you want, Tommy?" she demanded, voice as vinegary and dead as he remembered. He pictured her in one of her many hot pink lounge chairs wearing a shitty floral dress that substitute teachers who hated their job wore weekly, maybe a cup of black coffee in her bony grip, yellowing her already unsavable teeth even more. "Is this about the adoption application? Because you can't cancel that now unless—"

"What?" he interrupted, his face furrowed in disgust at even the idea of cancelling it. "No, I'm happy here, I don't..." he paused and rocked the baby in his arms. "I don't want to cancel the adoption anyway."

"Good," she said, surprising him. He thought the woman would thrive off his misery and happily recycle him into another foster home.

He shook off the thoughts and returned his attention back to Dream, the fucking *baby*. "But Linda, just because I'm not your problem anymore doesn't mean you're off scot-free," he began with a grin. "I have something for you, a particular case straight up your alley."

"I swear, Tommy if this is another prank call like in the first home—"

"I have a baby for you! Orphaned and all!" he proclaimed as he bopped Dream on his nose. "He has the same 'gang' tattoo as me so having problem children and pathological liars will be your speciality," he added, trying to keep the bitterness out of his voice.

He wondered for a moment what myth Kristin gave Dream. Even though the fucker was a baby now, technically innocent of all crimes and immorality until he gained consciousness at speaking age, this was still Dream. His punishment was so Dream understood what he put *everyone* through. With Niki's cycle of loneliness on Calypso's island, his brother's chained consequences, Tobias' set up for failure, Fundy's insanity, his father's unfulfillment and his own abandonment in all lives. Dream should know what it all was like, every stab of pain and throb of hurt, every wet tear and panicked breath. All of it.

Maybe Odysseus would do. Something about having to survive constant obstacles delaying your desperate mission to return to your family, the people who cared about you, only for them to have changed and not recognise you when you eventually reunite, seemed... fitting.

If that was the case then Dream would know what Tommy felt over and over again, wanting for a family in foster care and fighting to keep them when he found the Crafts.

Though Odysseus had a happy ending, when his wife believed who he said he was, and their love survived. Tommy bit on his lip. Did Dream deserve a myth with a happy ending? Or did he deserve a gruelling tragedy, fuelled with heartbreak, death, betrayal and abandonment?

That was for Kristin to decide.

“Tommy? Are you there?” Linda’s voice broke off his thoughts.

“I’m here and ready for a baby transaction,” he bit back, scowling at Dream. He hated the part of him that wished for Dream to have a nice home, for him to have a nice childhood and people to help him through the torture of the curse. Dream didn’t earn this easy way of life, but right now this wasn’t Dream—this wasn’t Zagreus, God of rebirth and hunting. And he never would be again.

As he negotiated the details for Linda to pick up Dream, the guilt as heavy as the child in his arms, weighted down inside of him.

But just as Dream forced a cycle of pain onto him, he would, in spite, continue its legacy.

It was finally happening.

Exam season had just ended for everyone, meaning Tommy could do fuck all for the rest of the summer, and it was time. Time for the final court hearing of his adoption. Everything else had been sorted, they’d been to court a couple of times now, just to go through documents and finalise the paperwork. But now, it was the last process. The final time he’d ever have the last name Idelle, the last time he’d be legally attached to the Kinoko Foster System and have to deal with Linda Smith.

Yet, his excitement faded as he stared into his wardrobe mirror. He had to wear a suit for this and he could not for the life of him tie a tie. Tubbo had sent him tutorials on their group chat whilst Ranboo just sent many ‘lmao’ messages, laughing at his pain. It wasn’t his fault he had never worn a suit before.

It was only when Phil entered his room that he was saved from this hell. The man wore a similar suit, his tie already done (of course it was green and white striped—Tommy would bully him for it another time).

“Philza, help me,” he whined, tugging at his tie. At first, he was against wearing a tie, especially since it meant his bruised neck would be on display, but Niki had come round earlier and used whatever ‘foundation’ and ‘concealer’ was to cover it up.

Phil stifled his hilarity at the situation and approached him. “Be glad I’m the one doing this because Wilbur would just laugh at you and Techno would tie it too tight.”

He rolled his eyes and shoved the tie in Phil’s hands.

Swiftly, Phil wove the tie around Tommy’s neck and did it for him, tugging on it slightly as he finished. A smile curled in something Tommy couldn’t detect adorned Phil’s lips—maybe endearment or pride. Regardless, it was a soft expression.

“Are you nervous for today?” Phil asked as he brushed lint off Tommy’s shoulders and straightened his blazer.

“Kinda,” he answered. It was a big day, an event he had always wished for, the conformation of a family that legally couldn’t leave him at the side of the road—not that the Craft’s would do that anyway (well, maybe Wilbur but as a joke).

“Well,” Phil said, the smile returning in full brightness, “whatever happens in that courtroom, I don’t care because either way, you are exiting that building as my son.”

His words wormed softness deep into Tommy’s heart, warming him all over and showering him in everything he never had when growing up for the first time back in his first life. Every splinter in his soul caused by his first father’s neglect and disapproval dissolved at the simple tone of Phil.

“I would hug you but I’d crease our suits,” he replied, struggling to keep the waver out of his voice. He had never felt such a burst of emotions before.

Phil chuckled. “We’ll save it for after our hearing.”

He thought the hearing would go like the last one did, where he could say jokes under his breath to Wilbur and kick Techno’s chair. The judge knew he was doing this and just let it slide. But not this time. It was different, more serious and urgent.

The moment he called onto the stand and had to swear that he wouldn’t lie, it was lucky for everyone in that room that he didn’t end up shitting himself. Wilbur kept nodding at him with that slanted smile of his, reassuring him that it was all okay with a single look.

When asked about his confirmation of wanting to be adopted by the Craft’s, the words came out of his mouth quicker than they formed in his head. Of course he wanted to be adopted by them, why the fuck would he *not*? They were perfect, they knew what to do when he got upset, when it all got too much, when he lashed out; they just all understood each other, their faults and problems, their quirks and likes. It was a family he never wanted to leave.

As soon as the judge signed off the papers officially awarding legal custody, the weight on his shoulders, the burden that followed him restlessly since his first death, disappeared. No longer thought about nor pondered in the silence gaps between conversations. It was done, he finally got what he had wanted for *centuries*.

Phil stuck to his word and hugged him. Neither cared about their suits creasing anymore or even about the tears wetting the silk—all they cared about was that the other was in their arms and they were a family. Officially, a family.

More bodies joined their hug. Wilbur towered over them whilst Techno went in for the width, encasing his arms around them all in the middle, surprising them since Techno was the last one to initiate in *this* much contact.

He breathed in, relief filling him whole. “Thank you,” he whispered.

Tommy could stay in their grip for hours, but eventually, they departed. He rubbed his stuffy nose and eyes, a permanent smile on his mouth. He could already tell that by the end of today, the creases of his mouth and cheeks would hurt but he was *happy*.

He turned to Phil. “Does this mean I don’t have to sleep in the dog’s pen anymore?” he joked.

Sam looked at them, horrified.

“Another joke! That was a joke, Sam, please he’s joking—” Phil scrambled to say.

“We don’t even have a dog,” Wilbur added, though it didn’t calm the man of anything.

“Can we get a dog?” Techno asked.

Phil buried his face into his hands.

Tommy nodded at Techno. “I’ll guilt-trip him into getting us a dog.”

“Floof,” Techno agreed.

“Also,” he said, causing Phil to groan because he could tell by just Tommy’s tone that what he planned to say was going to be a shit-fest. “Now that I’m officially adopted, can you get rid of the suicide prevention windows in my room?” he asked, smirking. “I’d like to not get heatstroke during the summer.”

“Cope,” Wilbur whispered to him, narrowly avoiding a smack to the arm as Phil stopped Tommy from hitting him.

“Yes, Jesus Christ, I’ll get them removed,” Phil said, exasperated. “Any other demands?” All three of them went to open their mouths. “Nevermind, just get in the fucking car.”

And just as Phil had hoped for, he left that building not as Tommy Idelle, but as Tommy Craft. One of them.

For some reason, he let Wilbur drag him into an undisclosed location at midnight. It was a weird request from the other, but this was the same guy who once started a petition for the eradication of an animal species and somehow gained three thousand votes (it was anteaters, by the way). So, Tommy wasn't *too* freaked out.

When they stopped in front of a familiar building, it made sense. Wilbur had taken him to his rehearsal room, where he usually performed and produced songs with his band. Now that his A-Level piece had finished, Wilbur had all the time in the world to finally make another album, one that wasn't hampered with stages of grief and heartbreak; an album more upbeat—still about that one ex-girlfriend though—and with plenty of trumpets.

Wilbur dragged him up the stairs and sat him down on one of the chairs as he got his acoustic guitar out of the case and set up the mic.

"I promised you that you would be one of the first people to hear my finished album," Wilbur said, sheepish in his speech, "Well, I think I'm ready to show you 'Your City Gave Me Asthma'."

Tommy fidgeted in his seat. He knew how much this meant to Wilbur, that each lyric he would sing and every chord of the guitar came from his heart, from a place of mourning and self-hatred. But that place had been changed, Wilbur no longer smoked in his shed, sobbing into his sleeves as memories of his mother wrecked him with a puff of smoke, he no longer shouted at Phil just to feel something or kept everything to himself. He was better—not fully okay or healed, but better.

"Are you sure?" Tommy asked, eyes flickering to the tremors in Wilbur's hands.

"I'm sure," he reassured, forcing those shaking hands onto the neck of the guitar.

Tommy never noticed how Wilbur's eyes squinted shut as he sang, how the crow's feet around his eyes creased and his eyebrows furrowed in a downcast motion. His face matched the emotion of the songs, ranging from anger and despair, to self-loathing and criticism, and acceptance of loss. Wilbur continued through the album, enduring it all even with how his voice broke and cracked at certain parts, the wound still not sealed but healing.

Tears brimmed as the final song echoed the rehearsal room and with the final lyric, Wilbur's eyes opened.

Tommy didn't even let him place the guitar down before he threw his arms around him. Wilbur had done it. The same man who fretted over the album for *years*, had buried each emotion and thought deep inside of him and only let it out when he wanted to hate himself even more than he already did, had done *it*.

"I'm so proud of you," Tommy professed into his shoulder, clinging to him as Wilbur shook. "I'm so fucking proud." He repeated it until Wilbur held him too tightly for the words to continue.

"It's because of you," Wilbur whispered, love saturating his voice. "All of this is because of you."

He looked down at Tommy as if the world meant nothing compared to him—and it couldn't be truer. The two stayed there for a while, encased in each other's grip, soaking in the comfort they needed. It was like that night on the graveyard bench but *more*. A moment of solidarity and warmth.

“Now that the depressing shit is out of the way, do you want to hear what my band is working on now?” Wilbur asked, his words muffled by Tommy's hair.

Tommy let go of him and beamed. “Fuck yes. Wait, please play ‘Soft Boy’ first, please, please—”

Wilbur ruffled his hair. “Shut up! And yes, I can play that.” He grabbed the microphone and smirked before handing Tommy the spare mic. “Come on then, let's give a performance.”

It was only after that Tommy realised that the microphone Wilbur had handed him wasn't even plugged in. But it was more the moments that he cared out—where they both screamed questionable lyrics about hoodies and cat ears into the mics and jumped around the rehearsal room, careless of the surrounding world and thriving in their shared rejoice. That was what mattered most to him.

On the first day of July, Tommy walked into the local café, knowing Niki was on shift and darted straight into the backroom.

Customers spared a glance at him and Niki excused herself from a table. She made her way over to him with a frown. “Tommy, the café isn't closed yet, you can't be in there.”

“Oh I know,” he said as he grabbed an apron from the draw. “I work here now.”

Niki blinked at him, stumped. She shifted in her step and shared a look to her boss, who sat by the tills. Her boss nodded at the two of them and Tommy gave them a thumbs up.

“What in the...” she shook her head. “Does this mean I have to train him?”

Their boss nodded again and Niki groaned whilst Tommy's grin widened. It was almost as if she knew that Tommy would try to make training him the hardest task to ever do.

He laughed at how startled she was by all of this. Techno was the one who suggested that Tommy get a summer job at the café since it was local and now that he was sixteen, he had a national insurance number and could legally work. Plus, it would mean he could annoy Niki and *also* get paid. A win-win situation.

During the break Niki awarded him after he correctly worked the coffee machine *without* getting the powder everywhere for once, he turned on his phone to see text messages from the family group chat.

His heart stopped at the title of the chat.

4/4: Family Chat.

Without notice, tears quickly pricked his eyes. Holy fuck. The name of the chat had changed. It was '4/3' before, meaning Tommy was the outsider. It was a joke, sure, but now it was '4/4'.

Why did such a small and innocent change do *this* to him? He sat in the back of the storage room, biting back tears, as he read the messages.

4/4: Family Chat

Phil: Good luck today at work!! Please don't explode anything

Technoblade: Bring back coffee.

Wilbur: ^^ what he said, also Niki hides sweets under the sink. steal them for me

oh and good luck

Technoblade: Yeah, that too.

He was *included*. It didn't matter that he was already a Craft with the adoption. You could be a member of someone's family and still be an outcast, an outsider to the family dynamics. But this... this meant everything. He was one of them, he was—

Tommy would be there for everything. For when Techno inevitably dominated the fencing section of the Olympics, when Wilbur's concert tickets would sell out in seconds, when Phil would finally remember to put four plates instead of five for Christmas dinner, accepting it all.

He couldn't stop the smile from spreading across his lips. A smile that would stay—just like him.

Chapter End Notes

So, this was the last chapter! Hopefully, it's a nice conclusion/epilogue to this fanfic, I was highkey sad throughout the entire writing process because I am very attached to this and I don't want it to end. But here we are.

I just wanted to say thank you so much to everyone who has liked, bookmarked and commented on this because I honestly didn't expect this. Thank you all so much for your support and kind words in the comments as well!!

Also cheers to Georgia who forced me to write an SBI fanfic because I am attached to writing DreamSMP stuff now. And thank you to Jasper for dealing with my ramblings and rants on DMs throughout the entire writing process, and for some of the fanart as well!

I have plans to write more stuff, Tommy-centric stuff because he is the main person I watch out of everyone on the SMP and his POV is what I like writing the most. I'm planning at the moment to write a Percy Jackson AU with Tommy, mainly focusing on his relations with Dream, Techno, bee duo and eventual SBI. So there's that if anyone is interested.

So yeah, whether you were here for the first chapter, found this in the middle or when this fanfic eventually finished, thank you and have a nice day(s) everyone :D

- Bari

edit: I've published the first chapter of that pjo au if anyone is interested

[Nights Left Unclaimed](#)

and I'm in the makings of a prequel to this as well!

[Calypso and the Blade](#)

End Notes

Prequel!

[Calypso and the Blade](#)

Works inspired by this one

[disenchantment and ichor](#) by [cannacae](#)

[Scorched Earth Theorem](#) by [Maerit](#)

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